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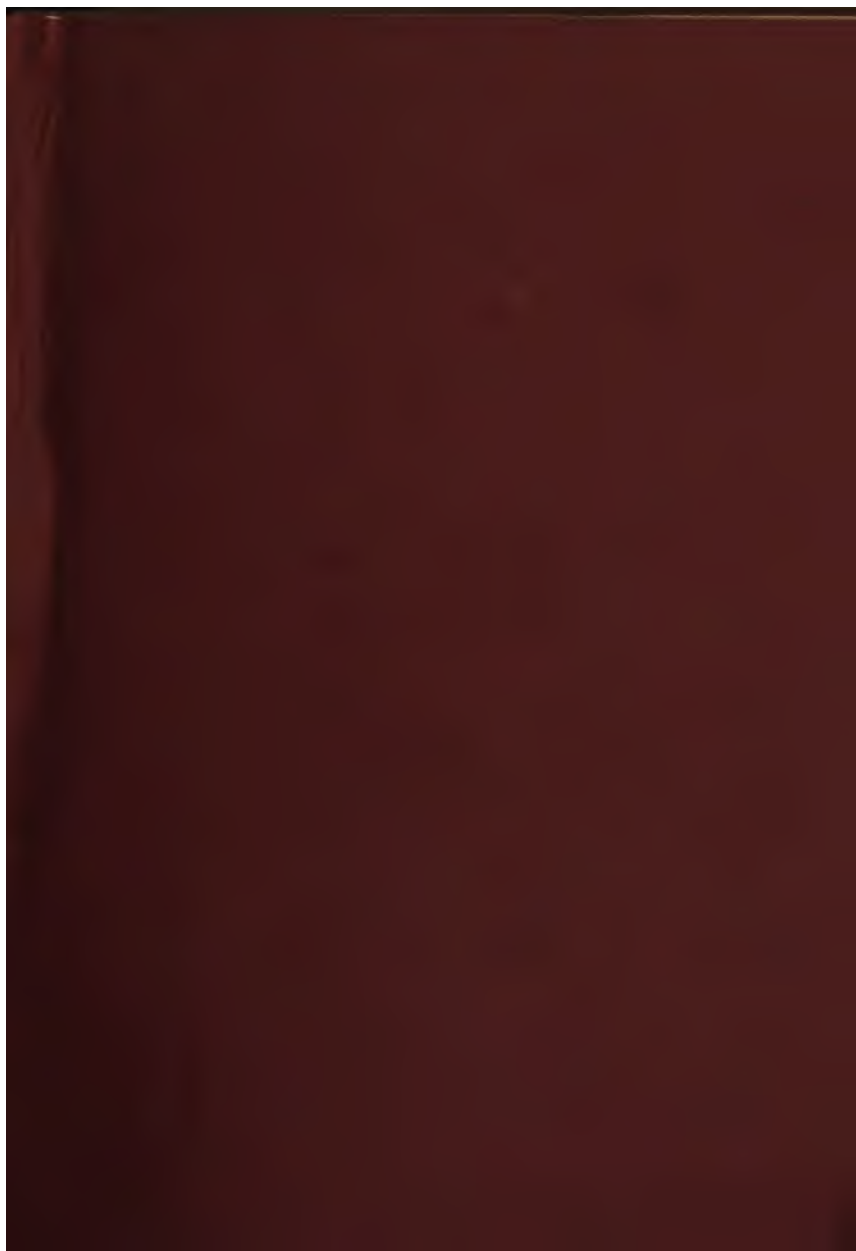
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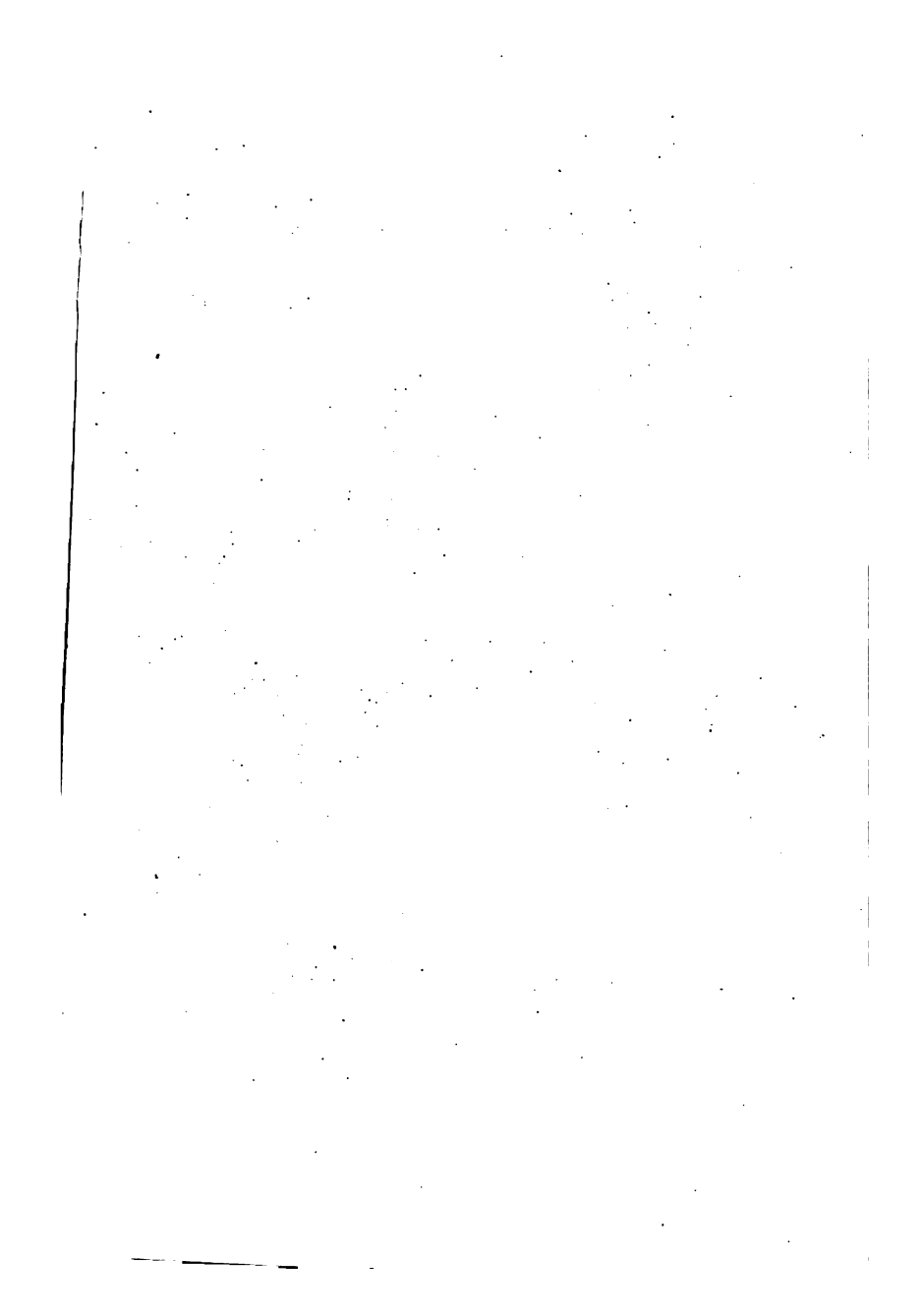
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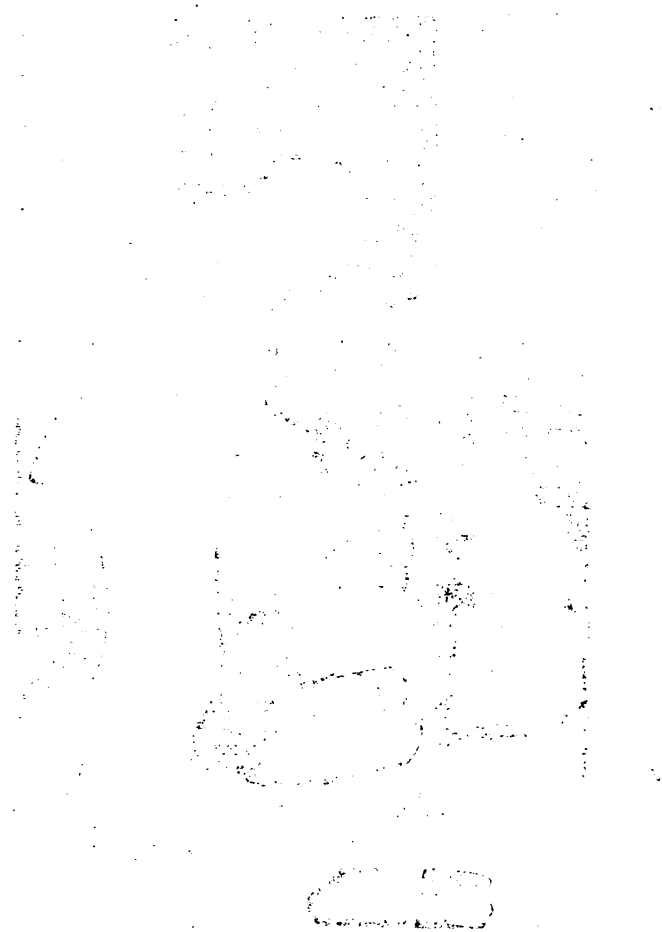




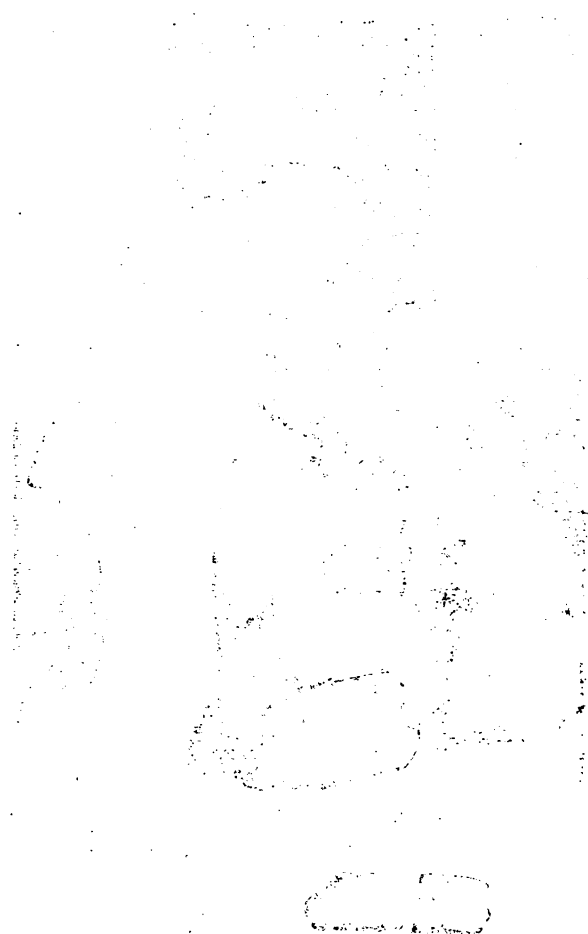


THE THREE LITTLE SPADES.





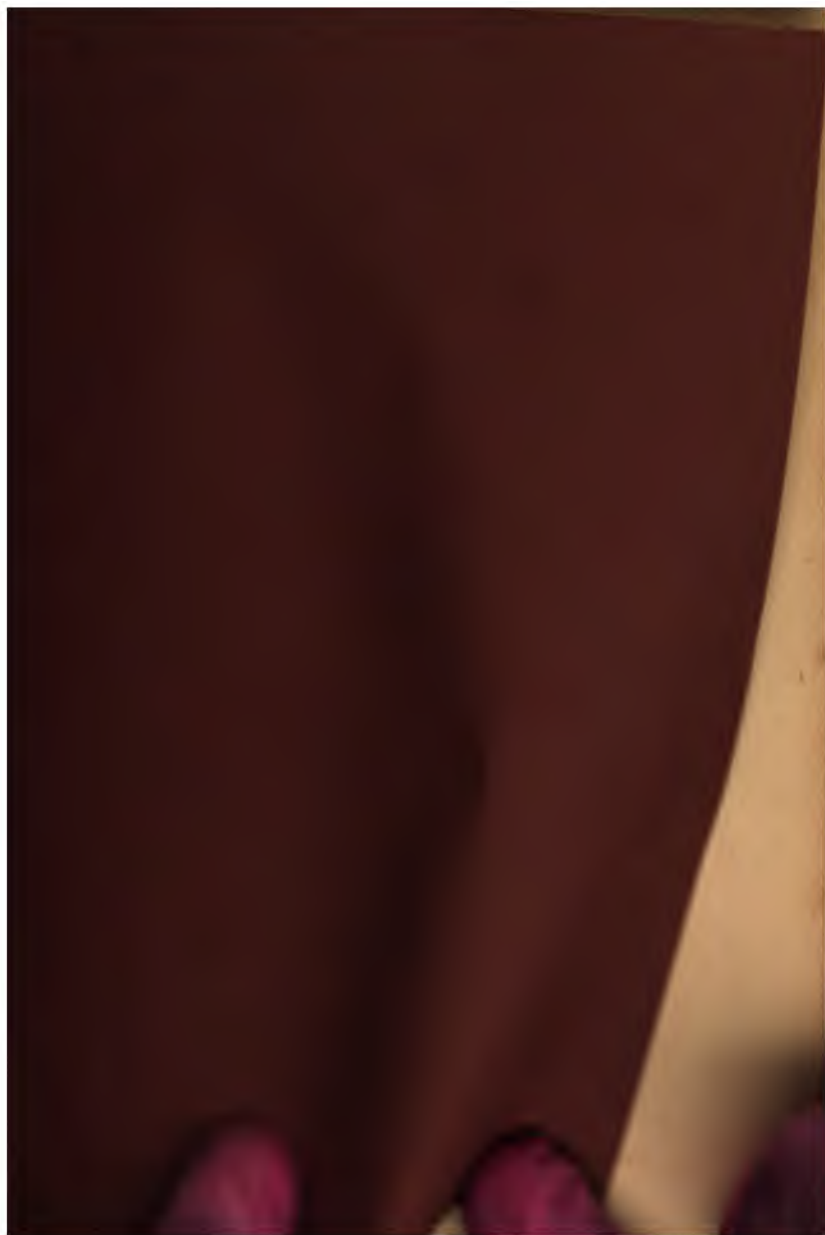


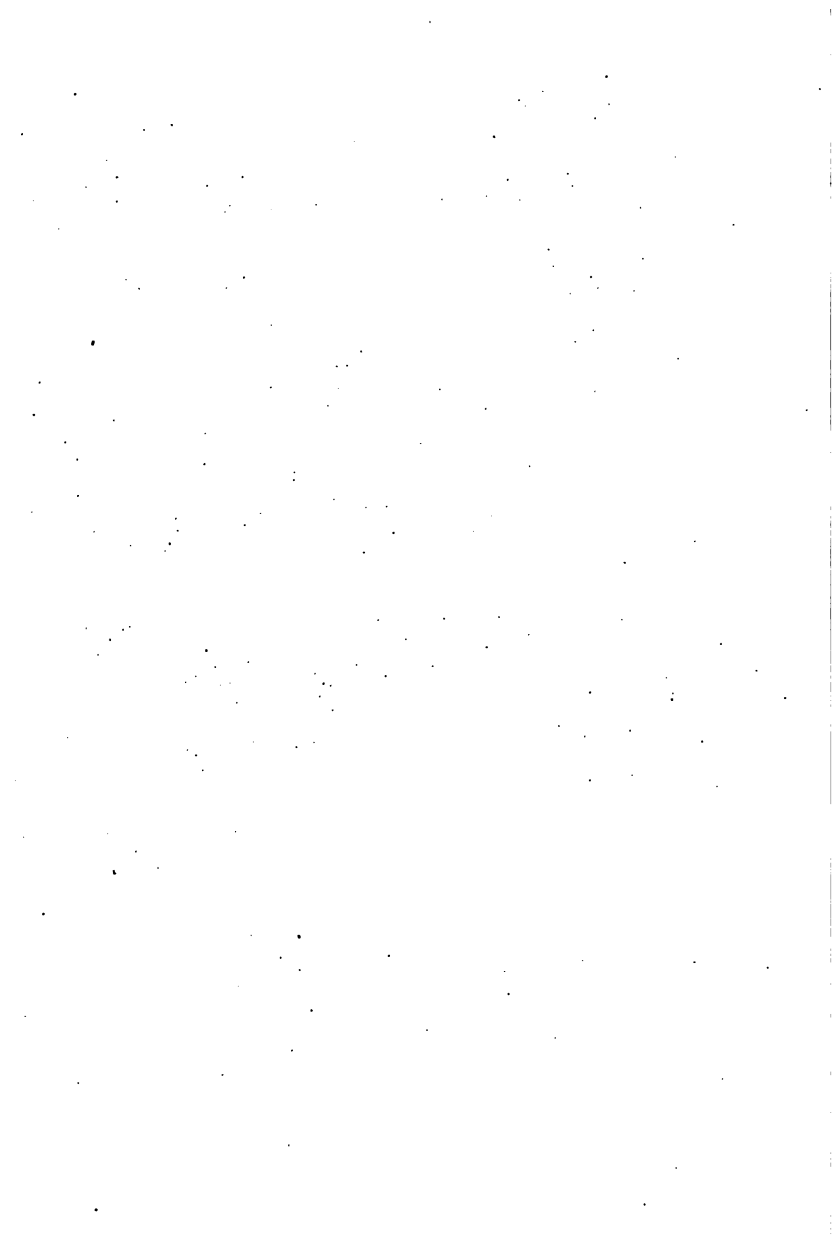




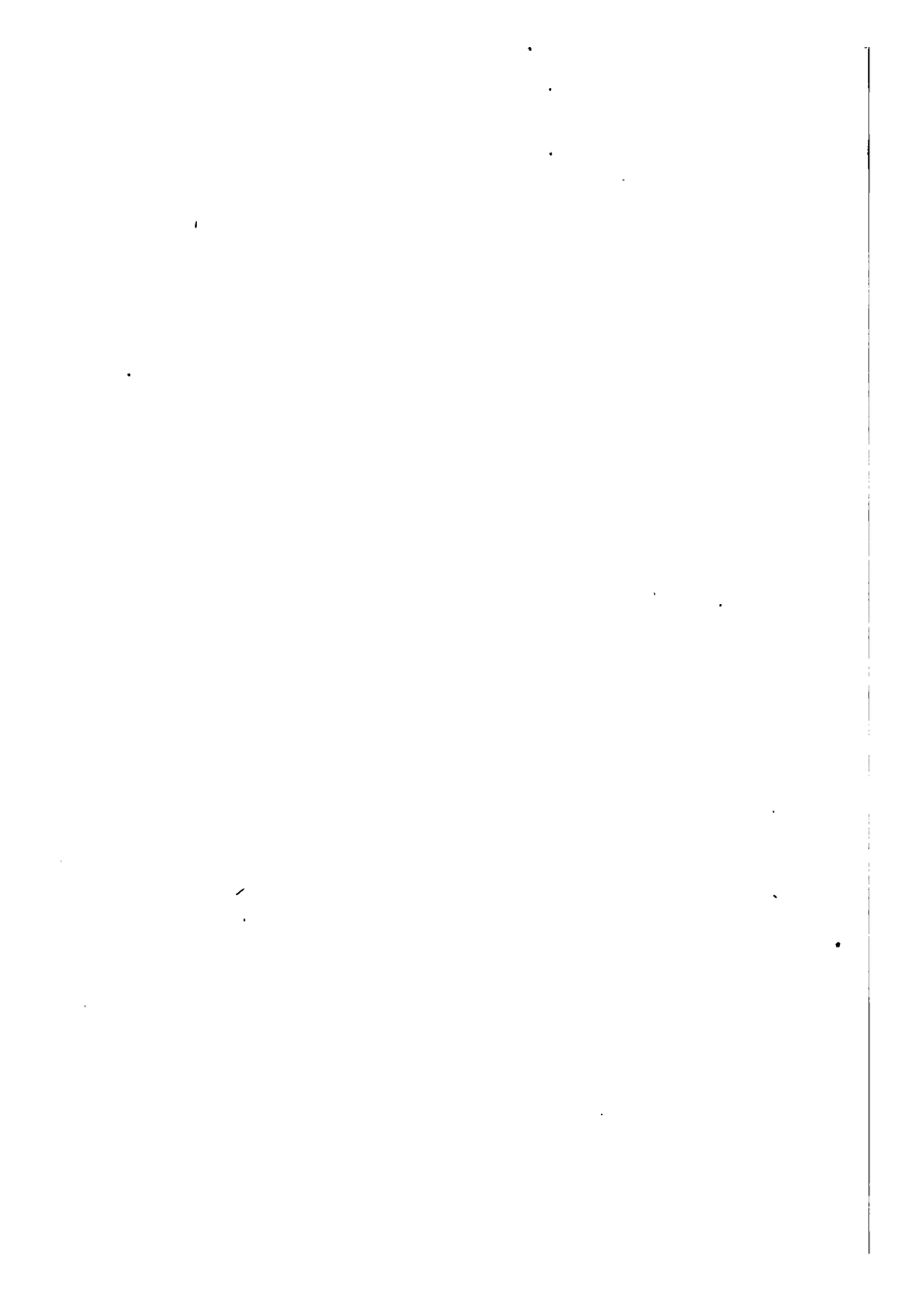
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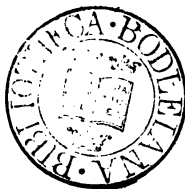


"'Can you spare it, Sir?' she said."—P. 63.

THE
THREE LITTLE SPADES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE GOLDEN LADDER," &c.

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THE THREE LITTLE SPADES.

CHAPTER I

"PAPA, please," said little Primrose, "what smells so sweet?"

Her father sat by the table, untying a large brown package; and from it came a strange, fresh, wild sort of perfume but sweet, as Primrose said, and very pleasant.

"What smells so sweet?" Mr May answered, cutting the last stubborn knot with his penknife. "Why, my dear, I fancy it is some of my new seeds." And selecting a small paper-bag from the heap which now lay spread out before him, Mr May held it down to the little girl's nose as she stood at his side. Primrose took a long whiff with great delight.

"Oh, papa, how good!"

"Good, is it?" said Mr May, laughing. "Prim, you ought to be a seedsman!"

"No, papa. But I wish I had a garden."

"So as to plant such sweet things as celery seed?" said her father. "Prim, this is not a flower."

"But, papa," cried the impetuous Lilian, flinging down her book on the window-seat, and coming to the table with a bound, "there *are* flowers, you know, and we might plant 'em ! Oh, papa, won't you give us a garden ?"

"If you please, papa !" said another little voice, now drawing near ; "there is nothing we should like so much ! Only I should prefer to have our gardens separate, because I should wish to keep mine in order."

"There spoke my methodical Clover !" said Mr May, with another laugh, as his orderly, sedate, chubby little daughter came gently and stood behind Primrose, who had not spoken again, but whose dark eyes watched her father with intense interest.

"One would like a garden to keep in order, and the other to run wild in ; and the third— What does my little Prim want of a garden ?" he said, bending down to kiss her.

"I should like it so much, papa !"

"Prim would nestle there just like a little bird," said her tall brother Sam.

"Papa," cried Lilian, "will you give us three gardens ?—I should like that best too."

"Yes, Lily should be allowed to grow weeds entirely on her own account," said Jack.

"When I grow any you'll know it," said Lily, with great good-humour. "Will you, papa ?"

"I find one garden pretty expensive now," said Mr May ; "what should I do with three more ?"

"Oh, they wouldn't cost anything—*our* gardens," said Lily.

"A very excellent sort of gardens yours will be then," said her father. "Where do you propose to get your seeds and plants ?"

"Well—just a little," amended Lily.

"Perhaps we could get wild flowers, papa," said Clover, thoughtfully. "And I've got one package of seeds already, that Maria Jarvis gave me. It's mignonette."

"And then just the ground is so pretty, papa!" urged little Primrose.

"Think so?" said Mr May. "I must confess I like to see the ground well covered. But who'll dig it up, to begin with?"

"Why, Robin," said Lily.

"Robin has a great deal to do."

"I guess Sam would," said Primrose. "He's never *too* busy, you know, papa, to do anything."

It was very ridiculous, of course, but—tall fellow as he was—Sam's eyes actually flushed with pleasure at this compliment from his little sister.

"And will Sam take care of the gardens all summer after they are dug up and planted?" said Mr May, lifting Primrose upon his knee.

"Oh no, papa! that's what we want to do."

"Well," said her father, "upon three conditions I will give you each a garden: First of all, mamma must approve. Next, each one is to choose her own seeds and plants, to suit her own taste. And, lastly, each must keep her own garden in order, after the first heavy digging is done. She must sow the seeds, and plant the plants, and dispute possession with the weeds—all herself. Now, what does mamma say?"

"I say yes, with all my heart!" answered Mrs May. "But I too shall make conditions—or, at least, one: In each garden, no matter how full it may be, there must be one corner set apart for patience, perseverance, brotherly-kind-

ness, and such sweet herbs ; and each shall be well hedged in with the Golden Rule."

"Well, children, now you know the conditions, what do you say ?" said their father.

"I like the conditions very much, papa," said Clover.

"They are easy enough," said Lily.

"Mamma," said Primrose, quitting her father and going to lean her elbows on her mother's lap, "what is the hedge for ?"

"To fence out such little mischief-makers as pride and selfishness and envy ; for if they get in they will root up every sweet flower there. And no other hedge grows low enough and close enough to keep them out."

"But, mamma," said Primrose, her little mouth dimpling into a smile of full intelligence, "who'll want the herbs ?"

"We shall see," said her mother, answering the smile. "I should not wonder if I came down to the gardens myself for a sprig now and then."

"Well, papa," said Lilian, "we agree. But where are the seeds and plants which we must choose to come from ?"

"I suppose from my pocket," said Mr May. "Most things seem to come from there nowadays. See ! here are three greenbacks—a dollar a-piece for each of you—how far will that go ? Far enough, I think, for little novices."

"Oh, papa !" said Clover, "a dollar a-piece is a great deal. Are flower seeds so expensive ?"

"All depends upon the sort," said Mr May, with a shrug of his shoulders. "They cost from five cents a paper to fifty cents a seed, according to circumstances."

"Fifty cents a seed !" said Lily. "I guess I shan't buy *that* sort. Spend all my money for two seeds, truly !"

"Papa, did you mean *me* to spend a whole dollar too ?"

said little Primrose, eyeing the greenback in her hand as a joy quite beyond belief.

"You are to spend the whole of it. And you will find it as easy to do as possible."

"A dollar will buy twenty papers of the five cent kind—only think!" said Lily. "Papa, will Robin lend us tools?"

"No, no; you are to have nothing to do with Robin. I will furnish the tools. Now, what next?"

"How are we to choose our seeds, papa?" said Clover.

"Oh, to be sure! Here is Mr Vick's Catalogue," said her father, taking it out from his package. "Full of names and descriptions and prices. You can study this at your leisure, and when the lists are made out I'll send an order for the seeds."

Prim's eyes glistened as her father fluttered over the leaves of the catalogue. What pictures of flowers were there!

"How splendid!" said Lily, taking it from his hand, and pausing over a bunch of petunias.

"Papa," said Clover, "I feel too rich!"

"Rich?" said Mr May, laughing—"you will feel as poor as possible when you have studied that catalogue for half an hour. I foresee an endless call for donations. In fact, you will be such poverty-stricken damsels, with your one dollar a-piece, that I think we had better take up a collection at once, before matters go any further. Mamma, what will you give?"

"Some strong calico frocks, and thick shoes and gloves," replied Mrs May, promptly.

"A most needed contribution! But tending rather to the comfort of the gardeners than the beauty of the garden."

"Oh, I will give the gardens each a rose-bush," said Mrs May.

"Ah, that is good! Sam, what say you?"

"A cutting of geranium, sir, for each; with twine for tying up the flowers, and strong sticks and labels. Also, the help of a knife and hammer and nails when wanted."

"All very excellent and necessary," said his father.

"I will furnish advice," said Jack, "in any quantity, and upon the most liberal terms. Also, as Sam says, a well-grown plant of Canada thistle for each garden—just to promote the growth of mamma's sweet herbs."

"It wouldn't promote the growth of mamma's hedge," said Lily. "If you'll furnish absence, Jack, we'll take it, and thank you too."

"For me," said Mr May, "I will provide the tools; and I think, under the circumstances, that is all I will engage to do."

"Do you mean that you will *give* us tools, papa?" said Lily, with flashing eyes.

"A little spade and watering-pot, papa?" said Primrose.

"You will see," said her father. "If I tell you all beforehand, the package will not be so interesting when it comes."

"We can wait!" said Lily, gleefully, "We've enough to think of for one day. Come, Clover, let's go and make our list."

"But I think I cannot make mine to-night, Lily," said Clover, as she came to the window; "I don't know yet where my garden is to be."

"That makes no difference," said Lily. "Just look at these pinks! Did you ever *see* anything so grand?"

"Why, it makes a great deal of difference," said Clover, eyeing the pinks with loving looks. "I can't tell what I shall want. I may have to 'plant out' something, you know; and

that would require tall things. Or there may be rocks. Oh, I'm so happy!—it's so delightful!"

"These gardens will be a study," said Mr May to his wife. "Clover, what do you know about 'planting out'?"

Clover turned back, blushing a little.

"Not much, papa. But I heard you and Mr Jarvis talking one day, and I saw something in a book."

"That's right," said her father; "listen, and then apply your knowledge. But go and make your list, my child; and then it can be modified here and there if need be. You will find it a longer business than you think. And I'll see where the gardens shall be to-morrow."

So the three children curled themselves up on the broad, low window-seat, and the work began. Mr May and the boys went off, and their mother sat silent by the table, her gentle face bent over her work.

CHAPTER II.

THE children of whom I told you in my first chapter had been (so far) brought up in the city. Brick walls, and noisy streets, and town sights and sounds, were what they knew best ; and it was no wonder that Primrose pronounced the celery seed "sweet," if only by way of comparison, and quite apart from its intrinsic claims. Of course their knowledge of flowers was all in one line. A greenhouse full of geraniums, camellias, violets imprisoned in pots, and cacti stretching their spiny arms wildly about, far away from their native plains ; an orderly hyacinth in a table-glass in a furnace-heated room, or a small bed of the same planted where now and then a stray beam of sunshine slept between inclosing walls ; a tall magnolia, growing forlornly between a brick wall on the one hand and the dusty pavement on the other ; a westeria, rambling drearily over a brown stone front in the vain search after something pleasant—all these they had seen again and again. But these are exiles, singing but half their sweet song in a strange land ; and every child knows the difference between their captive beauty and the free, sonsy grace of a truant dandelion, that every now and then runs away to see the world, and displays the *oldest* fashions in Fifth Avenue. Highly respectable little dandelion !—nobody ever dared laugh at it yet.

A year before this time of which I write Mr May had bought a country place, and with the beginning of winter

the family had all removed thither, to make it their home. It was not at all a remarkable place, unless for being at once large, old-fashioned, and comfortable—three things not always found together in these days. The house stood back from the road, with a short, smooth slope of grass between, and a simple white fence for boundary line. This fence turned up the slope quite near the house on one side; but on the other, where was the door of entrance, the green turf had even a wider sweep than in front, and the fence stood off at a respectful distance. Behind the house was a large garden and orchard combined, where already Robin was busy with his pruning-knife and hot beds, and preparations of all kinds. For it was now just at the end of the winter, and there were days when the very breath of spring was abroad; and the light on the bare trees looked soft and gentle, and adventurous blades of grass peeped out in sheltered places.

The front-door of the house being, after all, a side door, the real front was unbroken except by a large bow-window belonging to the family sitting-room; and as the first floor of the house was but a single step above the ground, this bow-window was something like a glazed porch, having its own low step without, and within a broad, divan-sort of seat on all sides. And now, in winter, shut tight with double sashes, it became the favourite resort of the children. Here they sat with their catalogue on this very afternoon of which I speak, hardly knowing whether they were most delighted or at their wit's end; for of all distracting things commend me to a well-drawn up, illustrated catalogue of flowers! Such a bewildering confusion of red and blue and purple and yellow; such descriptions of "snowy white" blossoms dazzling your very eyes; such "blazes of brillia: c3" that you seem to see; such "very sweet" perfumes

that you almost perceive ! The coloured leaves, the stately growers, the trailing creepers, the vines that mount up like Jack's bean to an enchanted world above your head. People go into raptures over lace and jewels and old china. Well, well, those have their place ; but it is not the place of a violet, after all. And they are not heart's-ease—they can never be balm.

"Now, first," said Lily, "oh me, whatever shall we do with these hard names !"

"They are not so hard when you have looked at them a little," said Clover. "Maria Jarvis knows ever so many. See—that first one is easy enough—'abronia.'"

"How shall we begin ?" said Lily ; "will you take the first part of the catalogue, and I the second, and Primrose the third ? or shall we divide by flowers ? Abronia for you, and adonis for me, and ager—ageratum for Prim ? Such names !"

"But that wouldn't be choosing," said Clover.

"No, it wouldn't," said Lily ; "and we've got to choose. Well, shall we agree that we won't ever take the same ?"

"But that would not be *choosing* either," said Clover.

"Then we'll just have to begin and no more about it," said Lily. "I don't want any of all these first four—do you ?"

"I want abronia," said Primrose. "It's sweet."

"Write it down then," said Lily ; "but if you take all the sweet flowers, I guess you'll have enough. And that's so little—only six inches high. But I'll tell you what I want, and that's snap-dragon—never mind the other name. Look, Clover, here's a picture of it ; and you see they say it's 'exceedingly brilliant.' Oh, I should think so, indeed !—'scarlet and yellow with white throat,' and 'crimson with

white throat,' and 'magnificently striped,' and all sorts. Which would you take?—here's a blood-red one."

"I should take this—see, down at the bottom," said Clover; "'best and brightest varieties mixed.'"

"Why, how splendid!" said Lily; "and only ten cents for them all."

While Lily was writing down snap-dragon, Clover peeped over the leaf and quietly headed her own list with sweet alyssum.

"What's that?" said Lily. "Oh, I don't believe you'll like that. It's just some common little white thing."

"But see these!" said Clover; "amaranthus, with red and yellow and green foliage. I must have that—they say it's useful for back-grounds."

"What are back-grounds?" said Lily. "'Love lies bleeding'—what a funny name! Prim, don't you want anything on this page?"

"I'll see what there is first," said Primrose, knitting her little brows; "on all the other pages, I mean. Because I get so confused. I think I want everything; and you know I can't have that."

"Oh, but a dollar will get a great deal," said Lily. "Just look at those asters! I *must* have them."

"So must I, some of them," said Clover. "And there are ever so many kinds. Which one will you take?"

"This first one—'perfection,'" said Lily. "There can't be anything much better than that."

"I'll take the 'chrysanthemum'—flowered," said Clover. "I like chrysanthemums."

"Well, I guess I'll have this little one—'pyramidal bouquet,'" said Primrose. "Because I like bouquets."

"Prim's garden will be all six inches high," said Lily, laughing.

"They say balsams are beautiful," said Clover, writing the name down on her list. "And they must have good culture; you see they must be sown and then transplanted, and pinched off. That's just what I shall like. I think I can take pains enough."

"Then you'd better take some cockscombs," said Lily—"recommended to all who will give their plants good care." Why, I mean to do that, too, of course; but then I don't want fussy things."

"Oh! oh!" cried Primrose—"just look at these dianthus flowers over the leaf!"

"Dianthus!" said Lily—"what's dianthus? Why, they are perfectly splendid!"

"They are pinks," said Clover; "it says so down here. I never saw any thing so beautiful in all my life!"

"No, I believe you never did," said Lily; "and there are *ever* so many kinds. Let's go all through and look at the pictures the first thing. There's something—I don't know what; and pansies—and petunias. Mamma, this catalogue is perfectly fascinating!"

Mamma laughed a little at that. "How do the dollars hold out, Lily?" she asked.

"Oh! I don't know," said Lily—"well, I guess. You see, mamma, we are going through just to put down a few of the most striking ones first, and then we can add to the lists afterward."

"How many 'most striking ones' does each list contain at present?" said Mrs May, looking very much amused.

"We haven't counted yet, mamma. Now, there's some-

thing I should like—a ‘double green-centred sunflower,’ from five to eight feet high.”

“That sounds imposing, at least,” said Mrs May.

“Don’t you like sunflowers, mamma?—the name’s pretty. What do they look like?”

“Mamma,” said Primrose, going to her side, “what flower do *you* love best?”

“I am quite fond of primroses!” said Mrs May, taking the little face between her hands and giving it a kiss.

“And you’d like some more?” said Primrose, laughing.

“Very much!”

“Well there’s plenty of ’em in Mr Vick’s Catalogue,” said Prim, gleefully, going back to her seat. “And I’ll write ’em right down.”

“But, Lily,” said Clover, presently looking up from her list, “mamma has reason—how far *will* a dollar go? It will never buy all these in the world!” said Clover, showing a slip of paper well pencilled on both sides.

“Oh! I guess it will,” said Lily; “a dollar’s a great deal. Let’s count up and see. But I haven’t written down the prices—never mind; we can turn over the leaves again. There’s snap-dragon one—I mean ten; and aster fifteen! how comes that, I wonder?—fifteen is twenty-five; and pinks, ten more, makes thirty-five; and my sunflower is forty-five; and pansy, sixty-five; and my double portulaca—Dear me, *that* will never do!—double portulaca, *fifty*! Why, I must have five dollars’ worth on my list at that rate.”

“I’ve got three dollars’ worth on mine,” said Clover, laying it down with a blank face. The children looked at each other, then broke into a laugh.

"Prim was wise," said Lily; "she waited. Well, we've just got to begin over again, that's all."

"Yes," said Clover, "we began all wrong. I ought to have had more sense. The way is to put down only what you *must* have, at first; and then write down the price after each one. Let's take new slips of paper, and make a nice list this time."

"Well," said Lily; and she wrote at the top of her paper—"Flower seeds that I *must* have."

"Now, don't let us talk," said Clover, "but just go over the catalogue quietly and *think*." And again the enticing pages were turned over, leaf by leaf.

"Well, this passes all *my* philosophy," said Lily, when she had again added up her list. "It seems that I *must* have at least two dollars' worth!"

"That's just what I've got, too," said Clover. "Papa might well say it would be a long piece of work."

"Mamma," said Primrose, once more quitting the bow-window for her mother's side, "isn't it funny?"

"And are you in difficulties, too?" said her mother.

"I've not made my list yet, mamma, I get so confused between what they want and what I want. I think I'll wait till they have all done with the catalogue, and then I can take it."

"That's not likely to be very soon," said Lily. "What can I strike out! Mamma, did you ever see this *bartonia*—very showy, with yellow flowers and gray branches?"

"Yes, I have seen it."

"Is it pretty?"

"It is very showy."

"Which is the prettiest, that or pansies?"

"Oh, pansies, if I am to be judge? They are showy and lovely too."

"How nice!" said Lily; "that's just what I'd like to be. I'll mark pansies with my red pencil, as a settled thing. But they're terribly expensive."

"It often costs a good deal to be showy and lovely," said Mrs May, with a smile.

"I must have my hyacinth bean," said Clover, "but that don't cost a great deal; and I must have some stocks, though they *do*. Mamma, are zinnias handsome?"

"Very handsome."

"I may want those, they look useful," said Clover, with her face full of plans and back-grounds.

"And I must have petunias," said Lily. "Mamma, my head's in a perfect whirl."

"Then if I were you," said her mother, "I would put my body in a whirl, and then give it a good run out of doors. You will not know red from blue if you sit puzzling there any longer."

"I guess that's true," said Lily, with a laugh. "I'm as tired—!"

And the children went for their hoods and cloaks and then off into the snow; little Primrose giving a lingering look at the catalogue where it lay on the window-seat. Her list was but just begun.

CHAPTER III.

"WELL, young ones," said Mr May, next morning at breakfast, "what of the lists? Are they made up?"

"Not finished, papa," said Clover.

"Papa," said Lily, "it's *terribly* hard work!"

Mr May laughed.

"I thought so," he said. "And so you have all been bankrupt half-a-dozen times? Well, I have chosen three places for the gardens. My part of the work was easy."

"Oh! papa," said Lily, "whereabouts is mine?"

"Why, that is as you all agree," said Mr May. "I promised to provide the places, but you must do the dividing yourselves. The first is down by the fence, just in front of the bow-window. The second lies close at the foot of the window itself."

"Papa," said Clover, "may the one who has the place by the fence let her flowers run on it?"

"The one by the fence may do what she likes with the fence, except pull it down. In like manner the one by the window may do anything with that except break it. The third place lies down at the foot of the slope to the west; toward the side fence but not by it. This is rather the largest of the three."

"Oh, I should like to have the largest!" said Lily.

"Till the weeds come," said her father. "My dear, have you thought about the weeds?"

"Oh, I don't mean to let 'em come—so I needn't think about 'em," said Lily. "But Clover's the oldest, she ought to choose first."

"I don't care about choosing," said Clover, "I daresay I can make something of either place."

"Well then I shall take the large place down at the foot of the slope," said Lily. "I can't bear to be crowded."

"Now, Prim," said Clover, "you must choose next."

"By what rule of preference?" said Mr May, who was watching the progress of affairs with a good deal of interest.

"She is the smallest, papa—it might make more difference to her."

"May I really choose?" said Primrose,—*"I don't think it's fair."*

"Why yes it is, if I wish it," said Clover.

"Well, then," said Prim, with gleeful pleasure in her very tone, *"I choose the place under the window. Because mamma can look at me when I'm at work; and I might be lonely down there by the fence."*

"I am sure mamma will approve that arrangement," said Mr May, as they left the table. "Clover," he said, softly, bending down with his arm round her, *"are you quite content?"*

"I? Oh yes, papa! I shouldn't enjoy anything, you know, if Lily and Prim were not pleased. And besides, don't you think, papa," said Clover, drawing him off to the window, *"that my fence will be an advantage, and give me nice facilities?"*

Mr May laughed; but there was great tenderness in his eyes as he stooped and kissed the honest, sensible little face, and went away.

"Yes," he said, "you'll find 'facilities' enough, and turn them all into felicities!"

Clover stood still, looking out at her fence.

"Oh, Sam!" said Lily, "will you dig our gardens this morning?"

"Certainly not," said Sam, without hesitation.

"Oh, why not? I thought you would do anything!"

"I will not, chiefly because it is impossible," said Sam.

"The ground is frozen as hard as a rock."

"Why, is it?" said Lily—"frozen? That's very strange."

"On the contrary, it is just what happens every year about this time."

"But when will it melt?" said Lily.

"Melt!" cried Jack; "the ground melt! Ha, ha! that's a good one!"

"Well, I don't see what you are laughing at," said Lily.

"Other frozen things melt."

"Yes," said Sam, "other frozen things melt, but the ground *thaws*."

"And as soon as the ground thaws will you dig up our gardens, Sam?" said little Prim.

"If I live and am well, you may depend upon it. As soon as the ground will work, I will."

"What do you mean by the ground's working?" said Clover, turning round from the window.

"Why, just now it is frozen hard, you know; and when it first begins to thaw it is very wet—more like mud than earth; and it is impossible to dig it well and break up the lumps, and make it fine and smooth. Indeed you can hardly dig it at all. But when the water drains off a little, and the warm sun has shone upon it for awhile, the earth gets dry and crumbly, and *then* it will work. So shall I. You'll find

those three gardens dug when you first get up some morning, I've no doubt."

"How interesting it is!" said Clover.

"But Sam," said little Primrose, "please don't dig *my* garden when we're asleep, because I want to see you do it."

"Why, it's not much to see, is it?" said Lily. "Just dig it up, that's all, isn't it?"

"Just dig it up, just right," said Sam; "and put on just what is wanted, and make it just smooth afterward."

"What do you put on, Sam?" said Clover.

"Manure of some kind. I must ask papa what kind this soil needs."

"Is it hard to dig it just right?" said Primrose.

"I hope it won't be, after the frost is out," said her brother. "I'll do my best to get it in nice order for your plants and seeds."

"We haven't got any plants," said Lily, "we shall have only seeds. Except mamma's rose bush."

"Oh!" said Sam, who was turning over the catalogue, "you've taken care of that, have you?"

"Taken care of it?" said Lily; "why we haven't got money to buy plants."

"Plants come from seeds."

"But, Sam," said Lily, "how can we sow our seeds till we get the ground to sow 'em in?"

"It does sound difficult," said Sam. "Are these lists made out?"

"Mine is," said Lily.

"Mine isn't," said Primrose.

"I can finish mine very soon," said Clover; "now I know where my garden's to be."

‘Let’s look over yours first, then, Lily, if that is ready,’ said Sam.

‘Oh, I’d like to have you, very much,’ said Lily. ‘I guess you’ll think it’s beautiful. You know papa told us to choose; but then each of us had such different reasons for choosing that I don’t believe we’ve got one thing alike. You see I took (generally, I mean) the flowers with easy names—I got so bothered with names half a yard long. And Prim wanted all the sweet things; and Clover,’ said Lily with a laugh, ‘wanted all the *useful* things. *Useful* flowers; it’s such a funny idea!’

Sam looked comically down at his catalogue.

‘The three lists, then,’ he said, ‘may be divided into Sweet, Useful, and Easy-Useless.’

‘Well, you may laugh,’ said Lily, ‘but you’ll see what a grand list I’ve got, if it is easy-useless. I didn’t want flowers that were *too* much trouble, Sam; and I’d rather have something that I can call snap-dragon at once, and not be always saying ‘the tall, blue thing,’ or ‘the little, pink thing,’ because I can’t remember its name.’

‘Very judicious and proper,’ said Sam, opening the catalogue. ‘I conclude, then, that snap-dragon heads the Easy-Useless list.’

‘Yes, it does,’ said Lily; ‘this one down here; ‘best and brightest varieties mixed.’ That was the one Clover advised me to take.’

‘Useful advice at any rate,’ said Sam. ‘What comes next? *Alonsoa warczewiczii*?’

‘No, indeed,’ said Lily.

‘This one, perhaps, then—*amblyolepis setigera*.’

‘I should think people would be ashamed to give flowers such names,’ said Lily. ‘Little innocent things that can’t

help themselves. No, this is the next—aster: the peony-flowered perfection, mixed colours. Then comes calendula—that's a sort of marigold you see—and then canna. That looks so beautiful that I had to take it. And the 'mixed varieties' are only five cents."

"That *sounds* useful," said Sam. "How about this great cockscomb?"

"I don't like the looks of it much," said Lily. "I shan't take it. But here's a pretty thing, Sam—this little dwarf convolvulus—convolvulus minor. You see convolvulus major is morning-glory, but I've taken the minor. Ten cents—and all sorts of colours. And one must have some little things, I suppose. Then now come the pinks—just *look* at them! I've taken one, and Primrose another, and Clover another."

"You could not have made a better choice," said Sam.

"Then I've got this hollyhock," said Lily—"‘showy and double.’ I hope you like that? And oh! Sam, what do you think about sunflowers?—just see, ‘perfectly double,’ and ‘from five to eight feet high.’"

"I never saw ~~one~~ so tall," said Sam, waiving the more difficult question of his thoughts.

"Well, I'll see," said Lily; "I couldn't quite make up my mind. But flax—I *must* have that—‘brilliant crimson,’ and flowers all summer. I didn't know flax was so beautiful."

"This is not the common kind," said Sam.

"I wanted some pansies, but I couldn't have everything," said Lily, turning over the leaves rather fast, as if to hide from her sight all the unattainable beauties; "and of course I couldn't give up these petunias. There—just look! But they are terribly expensive—twenty cents; and that just

takes all the rest of my money ! Now, Sam, what do you think ? isn't it a good list ? ”

“ Very good,” said Sam, “ and not difficult.”

“ There's all sorts of peas and beans over here,” said Lily ; “ but I thought they sounded common. And there's something else, beginning with an Z, that looks handsome, but the name's ugly. And one can't have everything.”

“ Sam, where did you learn so much about flowers ? ” said Mrs May from her table.

“ At Thornbrake, mamma, while I was at school. Mr Austin's place was close by, and I did a great deal of work and play too in his gardens.”

CHAPTER IV.

"I'm afraid I may have to alter my list, Sam," said Clover ; "I'm afraid mine *is* difficult. I wrote down just what I wanted at first without noticing how the seeds were to be planted ; and now I see some of them must be 'under glass.'"

"Never mind," said her brother, "let's take the list first and the difficulties afterward. It is a great point to know what you want."

"I know *that* pretty well," said Clover ; "only it was hard to want little enough. Well then, Sam, first of all, you know, I must cover my fence ; and papa said I might have just as much *fence* as I liked."

"Fence *ad libitum*," said Sam ; "yes, that's right."

"So first of all I chose some vines," said Clover. "This beautiful hyacinth bean, with dark purple flowers and varnished pods—it must be splendid, I think."

"Varnished pods ?" said Lily, "where did you find that ? I thought it was just a bean—and beans are so common."

"Well, maybe it is common," said Clover, "but I guess not ; for Mr Vick says it ought to be grown more than it is. And it will cover my fence grandly, for the shoots are sometimes twenty feet long. But then, Sam, I thought it would not do to have the fence all dark—so I chose next this pretty canary-bird vine, with fringed yellow flowers."

"Very well chosen," said Sam. "Don't you want a blue vine too? here are blue *Ipomœas*."

"I thought of that," said Clover, hesitating a little bit. And then softly bending down Sam's head to where little Primrose sat on the floor at his side, Clover silently pointed out to him in large, childish writing at the very head of Prim's list—" *Ipomœa grandiflora superba*."

"So I thought I wouldn't," she said, with a smile; "a second one might hurt the superb effect, you know, Sam. And don't you think yellow and purple go well together?"

"Nothing could be better," said Sam, twining his arm round the girl's waist, and drawing her close to his side. "And I see you have got the start of me, Clover, and have planted your hedge before I have even the ground dug up."

"Planted my hedge?" Clover repeated. Then, with a smile and a flush, "I think mamma was the planter, Sam."

"And may God give the increase!" said her brother, tenderly. "Now what comes next? The fence being covered, what shall we do with the ground?"

"I thought," said Clover, a little shyly, "that my vines would show better at intervals, you know—not to see quite the whole of them at once. So I chose these tall zinnias and martynias for flowers, and then to mix with them this pretty amaranthus—Joseph's coat—with its three-coloured leaves. I think they'll do for a background," said Clover, with the same shy look at her brother's face, which somehow or other confused her and brought a blush into her own. But he only said as before:—

"Well chosen. What next?"

"Next, in front," said Clover, "I want a whole mass of flowers, the gayest I can get. There's stocks, and salpiglossis, and gaillardia, and celosia, and balsam, and argemone, and

helichrysum. The helichrysum flowers are good all winter."

"A first-rate list," said Sam. "Don't you want some very low-growing flowers just in front, to slope it quite down to the grass?"

"Yes, I wanted some very much," said Clover, "but my money gave out. And then I thought the taller flowers would show best from the house, and so that I had better keep them. But I can change my list."

"No, no," said Sam; "you are to *choose*, you know. And the list is capital. Now, little one," he said, lifting up Primrose and placing her on his knee, "what sort of a collection of sweets have you got together?"

"Oh, it's so difficult!" said Prim, knitting her small brows and turning the catalogue leaves back and forth with perplexed fingers. "I wanted to get all the *sweet* things, but they are so many. And then Lily says some of them are so common. I'm afraid my garden won't look pretty unless I get some other things too; and I don't know what to leave out and what to put in."

"Your garden will look pretty, I'll answer for it," said Sam. "I never saw a collection of sweet things in my life that was not beautiful. What does Lily say is common?"

"Why, my sweet peas, for instance," said Primrose, studying her list.

"I'm glad if they are," said Sam, "but I never found it out. I think for every sweet pea you may find fifty fuchsias. Have them by all means."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Prim, her face brightening; "for he says they're so very sweet. And see, Sam, all colours. Then oh, Sam, I want this blue ipomoea!"

"Then have it," said Sam, smiling.

"But it costs twenty-five cents."

"Well, you've got twenty-five cents to give for it."

"But I mean," said Primrose, "it leaves me so little money for anything else."

"Yes," said Sam, "you must choose between one great beauty and four or five smaller ones."

"Is it a great beauty? Then I'll have it," said Primrose. "It don't signify if I *haven't* a *great* variety in my garden, I guess. But here's a beauty—a white primrose! That's what mamma likes."

Sam thought, as he looked down at the fair little face upturned joyfully to his, that mamma had excellent taste. Few prettier things to be found, to his fancy, than *such* a white primrose. But he only said, laughing—

"*This* one, Prim? Why it has a name as long as you are—*cenothera acaulis alba*."

"I know," said Primrose; "but it don't matter. I needn't say 'em all at once. Then here are my pansies, Sam; they're not sweet, but they're lovely."

"You extravagant little puss!" said Sam; "pansies cost fifteen cents!"

"Yes," said Primrose, sedately; "but I had to have 'em, you know. Then here is platystemon—I don't know what it is, but it *sounds* pretty, and it's sweet too. And here's datura. Oh, Sam, just look at this, with flowers seven to nine inches long, and sweet!"

"Must be a real horn of perfume instead of plenty," said Sam.

"Oh, but it's plenty too!" said Prim, "for it says 'very sweet.' Then here's abronia and callirhoe—that's not sweet, I suppose, but it sounds beautiful."

"That's a fine list," said Sam. "I'm not sure but it's the most troublesome one of the three; but as you are a patient, painstaking little body, you won't mind that."

"I like it," said Prim.

"But what's the particular trouble of Prim's list more than ours?" said Lily.

"There are more things that require transplanting, and more that must be started in heat."

"What's 'starting in heat?'" said Lily.

"Being very warm, and therefore beginning to grow."

"Now, Sam, don't be a tease! What is it *really*?"

"That is true which I said," answered Sam; "only it is the seed's side of the question. Your part of the work is to furnish the warm circumstances that bring about such a good result."

"Putting them in the sun, do you mean?" said Lily, "in a warm part of the ground?"

"The sun has very little heat to spare just now, and the ground is as cold as ice—being, in fact, frozen."

"Well, we can wait till it melts—I mean thaws—and gets warm, then," said Lily.

"And then some of your flowers, which need a long time to grow, would begin to bloom by about the end of summer. You must give them artificial heat, and make them a climate."

"Well, this is the funniest work!" said Lily. "Why, Sam, there isn't any artificial heat but the fire or the oven, and I shouldn't think baking would be useful."

"Sam," said little Primrose, looking very puzzled, while Clover silently knit her brows over the difficulty, "why don't you tell us what you mean at once?"

"Because I want you all to think and find out," said Sam. "You must not be ignorant little gardeners ; I want you to *learn*."

"And so do I want to learn," said Clover ; "but how can we ?"

"Now, here,"—said Sam, taking up the three lists in one hand and the catalogue in the other—"here I find, first, the Useful list—containing, we will say, two hardy annuals, eight half hardy, and two which are sometimes at least called tender. The Easy-Useless contains six hardy annuals, two half hardy, one tender : while the Sweet list has four hardy and four half hardy."

"But what does half hardy mean ?" said Lily ; "and how can seeds be tender ?"

"That is just what I want you to find out. Study your lists, and study Mr Vick's Catalogue, and make up your own minds how the different seeds should be treated. Then you can tell me what sort of artificial heat you want, and I'll try if I can provide it."

"What delightful work !" said Clover. "Sam, you're very good !"

"Well, wouldn't it be wiser to choose seeds that don't cost so much trouble ?" said Lily.

"Every one must judge for himself," said Sam, with a smile at his mother as he rose to go. "I shan't write the order for the seeds till to-night, so you can all make what changes you please. Study Mr Vick."

And away went Sam, leaving the three children in a pleasant state of uncertainty, excitement, and business. Lily took up the catalogue and lounged down on the window-seat, turning the enticing leaves back and forth ; Clover gave one loving look at her list, and then, folding it neatly

together, laid it in her work-basket, and took out her day's task of sewing ; and little Primrose, bringing up a round foot-cushion to her mother's feet, sat down and rested her face on her small hand, and fell at once into a deep brown study.

CHAPTER V.

AND so the bright morning hours crept on, and for a while nobody spoke. Mrs May stitched swiftly and silently, a glance only at the children now and then telling where her thoughts were at work ; and Clover, too, broke off her thread and passed it through the eye of her needle, and wrought at her overhand seam with noiseless patient industry. As for Lily, she had quitted the subject of seeds and gardens, with the difficult questions of hardy, half hardy, and tender ; and now gave all her attention to a fringe of long icicles that hung glittering in the sun from the very top of the bow window. The outer world was very bright that morning—clear, cold, and yet with a certain mingling of the softness of spring with the splendour of winter, that was very charming. Chick-a-dees whisked about among the leafless branches in utter gaiety and good humour ; hopeful song sparrows tuned up their long unused voices ; and the gray cat on the fence watched them both, her teeth chattering with eager desire instead of the cold. Mat, the rough Skye terrier, was also out for an airing, and sat in very contemplative mood on the gravel walk—perhaps musing what had become of the snow.

All this while little Primrose sat still, with her head against her mother's knee, and her eyes fixed on one particular half page of the catalogue. At last, with a long breath, she looked up.

"Mamma, if *you'd* just tell me about the tender things, and the half hardy things, and all that, I could understand it in a minute. But it puzzles me so!"

"You're to study the catalogue, Prim," said Lily. "Mamma, only do just look at these icicles!"

"I've been studying the catalogue," said Primrose; "and it says, 'Hardy annuals are those that may be sown very early in the spring in the open ground,'—I think I understand that. And annuals flower the first season, and these other things—biennials—don't; I understand that too. But then why won't the half hardy ones endure frost?"

"Pussy goes and sleeps all night in the barn," said Mrs May,—“could you keep warm there?”

"No indeed, mamma."

"And suppose your aunt Kate should put her canary out to roost with the chickens?"

"Why I think it would freeze to death before morning," said Primrose.

"Yes, for it is tender; but the chickens are hardy. And Puss is hardy, and so is Mat. Look at him—a few minutes ago he lay here by the fire, and now he sits out there in the cold wind, without even a sign of great-coat or mittens."

"Mat in mittens!" said Primrose with a laugh.

"But I think he has a great-coat—dear old Mat!" said Lily; "only it's more shaggy than any man's coat."

"It is just the same that he wore here by the fire," said Mrs May. "But he is hardy, he can bear the cold."

"And we're half hardy, and must be wrapped up," said Lily.

"Yes, and just so it is with plants. Some are perfectly hardy, and the frost can do them no harm."

"Those are the great strong plants, I suppose," said Lily, "the trees and bushes."

"Not always," said her mother. "Some trees will die in our northern winter; while the little daffodil pushes its soft leaves right up through the frozen ground, in the midst of snow and ice and bitter winds. It is something in the nature of each plant, something derived from its native soil and air, that makes it hardy, or half hardy, or tender."

"What do you mean by its native soil, mamma?" said Clover, laying down her work. "Are plants of different nations, too, like people?"

"Certainly," said Mrs May, "and with strong national differences. Geraniums, for instance, the greenhouse *Pelargoniums* which we call geraniums, with their glowing colours and rich leaves, are native Africans; they grow in tropical heat, where long creeping vines make ladders up and down the cliffs for the wild monkeys."

"Geraniums and monkeys!" said Lily. "Oh, splendid!"

"Mamma," cried little Primrose, "how lovely it must be."

"Not very—the monkey part of it," said her mother smiling. "For indeed they are many of them not true monkeys, but large baboons, very ugly and very mischievous."

"How large, mamma?" said Lily, who had a great weakness for everything like a monkey.

"Some as large as a mastiff, and much stronger: of a dark-brown colour, with black hands and feet, a violet-blue face, and gray whiskers."

"What objects!" said Lily, laughing.

"And the geraniums, mamma?" said Clover.

"They just help to set off the strangeness and ugliness of the monkeys. In the mountains about the Cape of Good Hope, among the rocky heights and passes, the sides of the

cliffs are covered with wild creepers ; the long trailing stems and runners making a complete network : not a network of bare stems, but all hung with rich foliage and brilliant flowers ; and scattered here and there among them is a wilderness of geraniums and other superb tropical plants."

"What a nice time the baboons must have !" said little Primrose, giving a sigh to the geraniums.

"A very nice time ! You can see them in troops of four or five hundred, sitting on the rocks, or climbing up and down the perpendicular cliffs by means of these 'monkey's ladders,' like so many schoolboys."

"I think Jack would have made a good baboon," said Lily.

"Lily !" said Clover. "And they're all 'tender,' I suppose, mamma, the geraniums and the monkeys and their ladders and all."

"All tender, not one could bear our winter climate ; while, on the other hand, we, and our violets and snow-drops could as little endure the fierce heat of South Africa."

"Then plants and animals are tender or hardy just according to the heat of the land they belong to," said Clover.

"Very much so. The cocoa-nut tree and the palm will not grow here in the open air, nor our apples and cherries in South Africa or New Zealand. The parrots never come to our Northern States, even in summer ; while the little snow bird wings its way to the very shores of the Arctic Sea, and there builds its nest."

"How beautiful it is, mamma !" said Clover. "Hardy, half hardy, and tender—the words have such a new meaning to me now. The birds that stay here all winter are hardy and so are our evergreens, and the oaks, though they loss

their leaves, and the roots of the grass, deep down in the ground. But my hyacinth beans will not bear the cold, nor most of my other plants."

"Clover talks as if they were all growing already," said Lily, laughing. "But, after all, it's very interesting, of course, but I don't see what it has to do with our gardens, nor why Sam made such a fuss about our learning it."

"Oh, don't you?" said Clover, her eyes sparkling with pleasure and interest. "Why, Lily, we've got to *make* a climate for these tender things,—it won't do to plant 'em right out in the ground."

"Make a climate!" said Lily, rather scornfully. "I should like to know how!"

"So should I, very much," said Clover; "but I suppose Sam can tell us."

"Well, I don't see the use of much fuss with our gardens, after all," said Lily. "I want just pleasure out of mine; and if I've got to learn first what the climate is, and then make it, for everything, I might as well be at a geography lesson."

"Oh!" Clover exclaimed; but suddenly checked herself and went on with her sewing.

"I don't want to begin with it, any way," said Lily. "I'd rather take the fun first and the study afterwards."

And silence came again, while the two needles made quick passes to and fro, and Lily watched her ice-fringe, now melting drop by drop.

"Mamma," said little Primrose, "how would you begin?"

"Begin what?"

"Our gardens, mamma."

"I suppose I should begin—as I do everything—with asking God's help," said Mrs May.

"Mamma! would you?" said Lily from the window, while Clover again dropped her work. "About such little things?"

"Are they too small to need his help? I know no such things."

"But would he like to have children ask him about their gardens?" said Primrose, wonderingly.

"About everything, dear, in which they wish for his blessing. Who can make the seeds grow? who can bring forth the flowers in their beauty?"

"And you were thinking of us, too, mamma, were you not?" said Clover, softly. "About *our* needing help?"

"Yes," said her mother, "for with every pleasure or sorrow, every success and every disappointment, come little opportunities for good, little temptations to evil; we may please God, or we may displease him. And even alone in our own little gardens of sweet flowers we have need to pray, 'Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.'"

Mrs May rose up and quitted the room, leaving the children to their own thoughts.

"Temptations!" Lily repeated. "Well, I suppose I shall know them when they come, though I don't see where they're to come from. But I must look over my list again, to see if I want to make any changes. Let's have the catalogue, Prim."

And the lists were made out that very evening, with some alterations, then put in an envelope with the three dollars and sealed up ready for the post.

"You see I *had* to change some things, Sam," Lily explained, "for every time Jack sees me he calls out, 'Snapdragon! Best and brightest varieties—mixed!' just as if he was a waiter on a steamboat. And I'm sick of the very name."

CHAPTER VI.

THE lists went by the next day's mail. It was such a fair, soft spring afternoon, in spite of the March wind that went roaming about, peering after squirrel-cups, and alder flowers, and I know not what, that everybody had gone out. Mr May drove off soon after dinner to Hickory Corner, the nearest village, saying nothing, like a wise man, of what he *might* find at the freight-station. Mrs May was away on some good errand among her poor neighbours ; and the children were clustered in the workshop, watching Sam.

I'm afraid that people who are fond of yellow satin and such light trifles would not have admired this old work shop; but the children thought it perfectly charming. It was but a room in the carriage-house, with two extremely cheerful and dusty windows, where whole generations of spiders had spun their threads and woven their tapestry unmolested, dealing out summary justice, with but short imprisonment, nor even the form of a trial, to all such wasps, gnats, and blue-bottle flies as came in their way.

In the middle of the room stood a long work-bench ; and the sides of the room, and every corner and window-ledge, were full of tools. Tool-chests stood on the floor, boxes of nails and screws, old pieces of iron, odd hinges, lay in the window. Here hung up a saw and there a long plane, with twenty other things of which the children knew not even the name. At present their whole attention was fixed upon Sam—

watching every mark of his gimlet, winking their eyes at every blow of his great hammer—so they stood in a trance of pleasure.

Sam was working away at a small box with a sloping roof, or rather with ends prepared for a sloping roof; and two other such boxes stood on the work-bench, each being roofed in with neat, close-fitting panes of glass.

"I don't see what the glass is for, after all," said Lily.

"Don't you?" said Sam. "Suppose we should break out all the glass in our windows some cold night, what then?"

"Oh, to be sure! the glass keeps the heat in. But then how does it *get* in, Sam? you can't make a fire in this little place."

"This little place would burn up pretty quick if I did," said Sam. "The heat gets in through the glass, Lily, from the sun. And it gets in better and quicker when the glass is sloped in this way towards the sun than if it were set up straight as it is in our windows."

"I wish I understood why," said Clover.

"Papa 'll tell you some day, or I will," said Sam, hammering away. "I haven't time just now."

"Here's papa this minute," said little Primrose.

"Why, so he is!" said Lily, going to one of the dusty windows. "He's left the wagon, and is coming over here with a big, big package in his hands."

Sam looked up for a moment and said, "Ah!" with an expression which proved that *he* understood the package thoroughly; and then began to whistle "Yankee doodle," and to use his hammer with great energy all at once.

"Sam likes *something*," said Primrose, with a laugh. "He always does when he whistles that."

"Sam likes several things—Primrose among the rest," said

her brother, stooping down to kiss her. "But here's papa."

And Mr May entered, bearing the great package. Such a package! with long white handles sticking out atop, and sharp black points and corners piercing the brown wrapping-paper below: the whole tied up and bound together with "forty strings," Lily said, as if on purpose to keep curiosity at a respectful distance. The children clustered round, asking at least a question for every string; Sam stopped his whistling, indeed, out of respect to his father's presence, but there was the fullest smile of pleasure on his face as he laid down his hammer and stood still to watch the proceedings; and as for Mr May himself, he was clearly as eager as the children, but he would not answer a single question. There he stood, untying some strings, cutting others with his knife, laughing at the children, giving their cheeks a pat or a kiss, as the case might be, but still at work on the package.

Such a package! I must say again. It was utterly bewildering and mysterious. And like an Arabian Nights' difficulty, vanishing into another just as great, the large package presently resolved itself (when the fortieth string was cut) into *three* packages—each one wrapped up in stiff brown paper, tied round with other numberless strings, out of which peeped white handles and black corners, just as before.

"There," said Mr May, with great satisfaction, taking the three packages in hand, and measuring the respective length of the white handles, "this tallest one is for Clover, and the next for Lily, and this smallest of all must be for Primrose! In fact, it looks just like her!"

"Papa?" said Clover, doubtfully, as she took the package.

"I know! I know!" exclaimed Lily, tearing at the brown paper which shielded hers. "It's our tools! our garden

tools! Oh, papa, how good you are! Oh, whatever shall I do with these strings! What is the use of tying things up so! Oh, Sam, I see the end of something sticking out of mine!"

And Lily tugged at the strings, and pulled, and tore the paper off, leaving the strings yet on; and finally caught up Sam's chisel, and began to work at the fastenings with that in an alarming way.

"Here, here!" said her brother. "If that is to be the style of operations, you may as well have help and a better tool." And Sam took out his knife, and quickly cut the cords, one after the other.

Clover, meanwhile, was patiently untying her knots, one by one. She had hardly spoken, had not exclaimed at all; but two pink spots in her cheeks grew very deep as she wrought with the hard, unyielding bits of twine, her fingers trembling with eagerness, though they laboured on so steadily.

Little Primrose, on her part, was another picture. After one prolonged look at her package, as if to find out wherein it resembled her crimson merino and golden hair and little white ruffle, she stood at a sort of "parade rest;" the package "grounded," her small fingers clasped tight about it, and her whole attention given to Clover's knots and Lily's fingers; her eyes dancing as each fastening gave way. Then, when brown papers fell to the ground, and the bright little steel tools, with their neat white handles, came full into view, Primrose gave one long "Oh!" of wondering delight; and then, as the only other thing she *could* say, turned round to her father and held up her little mouth for a kiss.

"Why, Prim, do you like them?" said Mr May, laughing and holding her fast, package and all. "Well, young ones,

be as happy as you can, I must go." And with a silent embrace from Clover, and a rather vociferous one from Lily, Mr May departed.

"Now Sam," said Lily, "put your work right up and tell us all about these things. Oh dear! I never was so happy in all my life!"

Sam laughed, and sitting down on the work-bench drew Primrose into his arms.

"Does not this little one want to see *her* tools?" he said.

"Oh, yes!" said Primrose. "But my fingers aren't strong enough."

"Mine are," said Sam. "There, you sit up here by me on the bench, and we'll untie all these knots, and talk to Clover and Lily at the same time. What do you want to know about first, Lily?"

"*This, I suppose,*" said Lily, displaying one of her tools, "is a spade."

"That is a spade. See what a beauty of a little one papa has got for Primrose! with a wee, wee handle just big enough for her little fingers. It's perfect."

There could be no doubt about that, from the way the little fingers took hold of it.

"But I thought you were going to dig the ground for us, Sam?" said Lily.

"So I hope to do the first time. But then there may be light digging to do afterward, and transplanting, and all that."

"And we want to learn how, any way," said Clover.

"Well, what's this?" said Lily. "Oh dear! there comes Jack. Now we'll have a bother."

"This?" said Jack, unceremoniously catching it from Lily's hand, "ha! a fine tool, I declare! *This*, young ladies,

is called a rake ; and it is chiefly useful for tearing your flower leaves into long stripes, to make them look fringy. It adds very much to the striking effect of a flower garden."

"You hush, Jack," said Clover, giving his shoulder a gentle tap. "I know a little about rakes. Sam, what's this?"

"A trowel."

"And trowels are used for digging up stones, and conveying them to the gravel-walk or the grass," said Jack.

"They are for transplanting," said Sam, smiling,— "for digging up little obstinate weeds, for filling flower-pots, and for smoothing the ground where you want to sow seeds."

"And this," said Jack, taking up another tool, "is commonly called Neptune's trident, which you perceive it resembles. In the sea, as used by its original owner, it was excellent for spearing fish ; but by the strange mutation of mortal things it is now used in gardens, to spear caterpillars, grubs, and earth-worms. This one of Prim's, you see"——

"Indeed *mine* won't be used for any such thing," said Prim, indignantly. "Spear caterpillars, truly ! I don't mean to have one in all my garden."

"Oh ! don't you ?" said Jack. "That alters the question."

"It's a weeding-fork, Prim," said her oldest brother ; "and weeds, I'm afraid, you will have now and then. See, you stick the little fork in so, and it loosens the earth, and the weeds can be pulled right up by the roots."

"How nice !" said Lily. "Only I don't mean to have any weeds. Oh, I'm so happy ! Come let's go and show 'em all to mamma."

"But just wait till I gather up my strings," said Clover.

"Leave 'em here," said Lily, "you don't want 'em."

"They may be useful," said Clover, sedately.

"Ha! ha! ha!" said Jack, turning a somersault in one corner of the workshop. "Such model gardens! One will have no caterpillars, and the other will have no weeds; and the other—I don't know, I'll keep watch about Clover's. She's as old-fashioned as a gray rock, and about as steady."

CHAPTER VII.

Now if there had been any unconcerned spectator in the old workshop that afternoon, he would have seen that so much sunshine was not without its shadow ; and of all places in the world it lay on the gentle face of little Prim. Quite unnoticed, however ; for Clover and Lily were too full of their own joy, and Sam too busy and interested in examining the new tools, to give heed to much else, and Prim's delight had been so very evident at first, that afterwards it might well be taken for granted. No eyes were brighter than hers when the great package was first brought in, none watched more eagerly to see the wrappings taken off one by one. But when Clover and Lily had untied all their tools, and Sam was hard at work upon the third little package, Prim's face began to wear a look that was more anxious than glad. With great intentness she followed every motion of Sam's fingers, as he unfolded her small tools ; just glancing at hoe and rake and spade with a look that said, plainly, "*That is not it,*"—passing them by in a search for something else. And when at last the little trowel and fork appeared, Prim gave them all one more glance and turned away. Silently she stooped down and picked up the stiff brown wrapping papers, laying them one by one together in another place, and then looked down at the bare floor at her feet, where clearly there was nothing more. But nobody saw it all ; and Prim stood quite still, struggling with something that swelled her little

heart almost beyond control; and when Lily said, "Let's go and shew mamma," Prim hurriedly gathered up her tools and followed the others into the house. If once or twice on the way Prim's little hand made a swift dash at her eyes, all that Clover and Lily knew about it was that Prim had dropped her trowel. But Mrs May saw the whole thing in a moment; saw the slight quiver of the child's lips as she came in, and the shining under her eyelashes that was not of joy, and the listless droop of the hands that held the new tools. It was well for Prim that the other two were so full of their own glad exclamations; and she drew back behind them, and thought herself quite hid.

"Just look! mamma," cried Lily;—"did you ever see anything so perfect? See, mamma, that's a hoe."

"Yes, I know so much as that," said Mrs May. "And this is a spade."

"This is a spade," repeated Lily; "splendid, isn't it? Just feel how light it is! Why, Sam says one could dig all day with such a spade."

"Could one?" said Mrs May, with a very doubtful raising of her eyebrows, as her unwonted fingers took hold of the spade (the first one they had ever touched.) "It looks like a very fine tool, my dear; and I daresay you will find it quite equal to my grandmother's needles."

"And mamma, do you see these beautiful weeding forks?" said Clover. "Sam says they're so good 'for obstinate weeds.'"

"Papa needn't have got them for *that*," said Lily, twirling round on both toes. "There'll never be any weeds in *my* garden, obstinate or compliable."

"What a charming garden!" said Mrs May, admiringly. "Pray is that word one of Jack's importations?"

"No, mamma—Robin's."

"I think I would let Robin keep it, if I were you," said her mother. "But where are Prim's tools?"

"Here, mamma," answered a sober little voice off in the distance.

"Oh yes, you should see them, mamma," said Clover; "they're so very pretty, so small and delicate. I think Prim's tools are almost the prettiest of all. Come and shew them to mamma, dear—I didn't mean to get before you so. Prim was so delighted, mamma!"

But there was no delight on the child's face as she came forward, and her mother's ear even caught a long-drawn breath that was very near being a sob; and it was with almost an air of weary relief that Prim piled the tools on her mother's lap and stood with free hands.

"Yes, this is a dear little spade," said Mrs May as she examined them. "I do believe I could dig with this myself."

A watery little smile gleamed out on Prim's face for a minute, but she said not a word.

"Well, are these all the tools papa got for you?" said Mrs May. "Are these enough? They seem very few to me."

"Oh yes, mamma!" said Clover.

"More than enough, I think," said Lily. "I don't see what we're to do with the spades, myself. Sam is to dig the ground for us."

"But we want to learn how," said Clover.

No word from Primrose, but only a tight clasp of the two little hands together.

"Then I may tell papa that you are satisfied?" said Mrs May.

"Perfectly! perfectly!" said Lily, with another twirl. "We're just as happy as it's possible to be."

"A great deal more than satisfied, mamma," said Clover softly. "Please tell papa so."

Still little Primrose said nothing, except with that same long breath again.

"Now run off and hang up your tools in the tool-house," said Mrs May. "Prim is tired—she must stay here and rest with me awhile, and then we will come out together."

"Mamma," said Lily, gathering up her tools, and dropping first the hoe and then the weeding-fork—"oh dear!—Mamma, what was that about your grandmother's needles?"

"Our great-grandmother's needles," corrected Clover.

"It's all the same thing," said Lily.

"But it does not sound respectful to speak as if we had nothing to do with her," said Clover.

"I'm sure *I* never had much," said Lily, "seeing she died about a hundred years before I was born. Well, mamma?"

"When I was a little girl," said Mrs May, "I used to get into a great deal of trouble over my sewing. I never could take small stitches, and I never could finish my seam, and so on. It is not at all an uncommon case."

"Yes, I know," said Lily, hastily. "Well, mamma?"

"And when I sat sighing over my work, my grandmother used to say to me, 'Dear, what is the matter?' And I, in the deepest trouble, would answer, 'I can't ever do this, I know!' Then my grandmother would say, cheerfully, 'Oh, I must lend you one of my famous needles,—that will bring it all right.' So the dear old lady would open her work-table, and take out her needle-book of crimson and blue brocade—but old and faded then—and choosing from its shining store a needle that was just the proper size, she would hand it to me saying, 'There, love, there is one of my

famous needles. Now if you will put it in just right, and take it out just right, it will do every bit of the rest of the work itself."

"Mamma!" exclaimed Lily, quite indignantly, while Clover laughed, "I don't want my spade to be like that, I'm sure. Come, Clover, let's go hang up our tools." And away they went, leaving Primrose in her mother's lap.

"Mamma," said little Primrose, after a minute's silence, "did the needles really do as she said?"

"I think they did, when I fulfilled the conditions," said Mrs May, smiling. "And are you quite satisfied with your new tools, dear? Shall I tell papa so?"

A little hesitation, then Primrose answered slowly,—

"They're beautiful, mamma."

"And are you perfectly satisfied?" said her mother. "Papa will be sure to ask me."

"Mamma!" said Prim, with a tone of dismay.

"I thought," said her mother, gently, "that you did not seem quite so much pleased as Clover and Lily. If any one of the tools is not just right, you know it can be changed."

"They're *beautiful*, mamma!" said Prim, looking distressed.

"Then you have not quite all that you want?" said her mother. "Is that it?"

"It's so ungrateful!" said poor Primrose, her lips trembling.

"What is it, love?" said her mother. "Oh yes, I must know. Is there something else you would like to have?"

"Mamma, it's *dreadful*," said Primrose. "Papa is so good, and took so much trouble."

"Then there is something else?"

Prim nodded her little head despairingly.

"What is it?" said her mother, smiling. "Not a plough, I suppose?"

"Oh no, mamma. Please don't mind," said Primrose. "I think I shall get over it."

"What then?" said her mother.

"Mamma—it was only—my little watering pot," said Primrose. "Oh, it's so ungrateful!"

"Not a bit," said her mother, gaily; "is that all the matter? Now listen, and learn how safe it is to tell me everything. When papa was just going away again, after he had brought home the tools, he stepped back, and said to me: 'The watering pots did not come, after all; there has been some mistake. I forgot to speak to the children about it. But they can drive over to Hickory Corner some day, and choose for themselves. There are any quantity there, at the tinman's.'"

"Mamma," said little Primrose, awhile after, as she and her mother and the new tools went hand in hand along the walk to the tool-house; "don't you think that papa is *almost* the very best person in the whole world?"

Which "almost," be it known, was put in by Primrose only to keep a place for her mother on the same platform of absolute perfection.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEXT day Lily and Primrose had gone out to the workshop to inspect the boxes and see how the new tools looked by daylight, when Clover came running out, her face beaming with pleasure.

"Now just listen! only do but listen!" she said, holding up a little sheet of pink paper. "Here's a note from Maria Jarvis, to ask us to spend a *whole* day with her—it's to be to-morrow, and mamma says we may go."

"Splendid!" cried Lily; "was that what kept you so long?"

"Yes," said Clover, "for I had to write an answer, you know; and that took me a good while."

"But you hadn't any pink paper," said Lily, taking the note.

"No; but mamma says she thinks white is quite as pretty."

"I don't," said Lily. "What a nice note! Oh, isn't it charming!"

"Yes," said Clover; "and I think we can learn so much about flowers, because they have so many. So Maria told me, that day at the Jordan's."

"'Chestnut Hill,'" said Lily, studying the note.

"Yes, we've never been that way," said Clover, "because the winter road's so bad; and the family were away too. But mamma says it's a mile or two beyond Hickory Corner, so

it's at least six or eight from here. Mamma don't know exactly."

"The further the better," said Lily. "I'd like to get *ever* so far from home, for once."

"Why, Lily!" exclaimed Primrose. "And from mamma, and all?"

"Just for once," Lily repeated. "To see how it feels. Clover, I do think we're the happiest children! There were the tools last night—our dear tools,—and here's this to-day. And I daresay something will come to-morrow—our seeds, maybe."

"Oh no! *they* won't be here for several days," said Clover.

"I would not expect them for at least a week more," said Sam, who came in just then.

"But why?" said Lily.

"It takes so long for letters to go, and for answers to come. And then a seedsman must serve his customers in regular order; and there might have been fifty names down in his book before yours got there, and then there would be fifty packages of seed to send off before he could send yours."

"Fifty people wanting seeds!" said little Primrose, with whom the world seemed to be all turning to gardens at once.

"Ay, and a good many fifties!" said Sam, laughing. "Never mind, Prim, the fifty-first parcel will have its turn."

"But Sam," said Lily, "do you know we're going away to-morrow?"

"I have heard. There—that box is about finished."

"And Sam," said little Primrose, eagerly, "if we go away

beyond Hicory Corner, don't you think we might stop just *one* minute for the watering-pots?"

"Doubtless," replied Sam, "or three minutes. Perhaps a minute for each watering-pot will not be too much. Now, young ladies, I have done my part toward your green-houses, or window-boxes, or whatever you choose to call them,—you must do the rest."

"You haven't told us what to do, yet," said Lily.

"These boxes," replied Sam, "have, you perceive, a sloping top made of glass. You will also observe that the panes of glass are movable. Now, when the boxes are in use, the sloping roof must be turned towards the sun, so as to get the light and heat. But if the heat becomes *too* great—in a very warm day, for instance—then a pane of glass can be lifted, so—or taken quite off, to give the plants fresh air."

"What a beautiful contrivance?" said Clover.

"But the seeds aren't to be planted just in the box, are they?" said Primrose.

"Ah!" said Sam, "that brings us to another branch of the subject. But you must come to another workshop for that."

So Sam laid down his hammer and led the way to another little outhouse, which seemed to be for the express purpose of holding everything that would not go anywhere else. Odds and ends of all sorts were piled up and strewn about; and among the rest there stood a great box of earth and a quantity of flower pots.

"Learned people do say," observed Sam, "that beginners should never plant their seeds in pots; but when nothing else can be had beginners must do as best they can."

"What should they use?" said Lily.

"Shallow boxes or pans. But, as I said, these must do

Here are the pots all ready, you see, and here is the beginning of the earth you want to fill them."

"Why Sam," said Primrose, "I should think that was earth enough to fill a thousand flower pots!"

"Yes, and more too," said Lily. "Pretty large beginning, I should think."

"But the thing is," said Sam, "that there isn't earth here to fill *one* flower pot—not of the right kind. This is only sand and old sifted manure. It wants earth, common earth out of the garden, and some vegetable mould out of the woods; and we cannot get either till the ground thaws a little, so it's just as well the seeds are not here."

"Sam, what is vegetable mould?" said Clover.

"The earth made by decayed leaves and wood."

"What's the use of mixing so many things together?" said Lily. "It's a great deal of trouble."

"It will be some to me, for I must get the mould from the woods myself," said Sam; "but the use is, that plants grow better; just as you would not thrive half so well upon bread alone, or one kind of meat, as you do upon meat and bread and vegetables and fruit."

"Why, do plants eat?" said little Primrose.

"Of course they do; and they're almost as different in their eating as people are. Some are called 'gross feeders,' because they eat everything before them—'exhaust the soil,' as gardeners say; some cannot grow very near other plants, because they want so much; or perhaps those other plants are 'gross feeders,' and starve them out. Some must be constantly supplied with the richest soil, others pick up a living anywhere and anyhow. Some must have sand, some demand clay; some are always thirsty, others like dry weather; and some do nothing but drink for one

part of the year, and then never touch a drop all the rest."

"Oh, Sam!" said Clover, "it's perfectly delightful!"

"Then I guess I'll have to be careful with my little watering-pot," said Primrose. "Because I might water something that would not like it at all!"

"Not many garden plants are so *very* particular," said Sam. "You'll see some of the notional ones in Mr Jarvis's green-house to-morrow."

"Sam," said Clover, "are all these notions, as you call them, derived—I mean, do they all come—just as the tender and hardy and half-hardy nature, from the native country of the plant?"

"I think," said Sam, "that it's the nature of the plant that makes its native country, or its native soil. Plants are made to be just so notional, I think, so that some one of them may grow on every spot of earth—hot or cold, wet or dry, rich or poor. We put all sorts together in a garden, and they live and flourish there after a fashion; but left to itself, each wild plant chooses its home. The seeds of water-plants will not open on the dry land, nor those of land-plants in the wet; and in the woods, where all places look so much alike to us, you will find one sort of flower blooming here and another there; and maybe not a second patch of either kind within half a mile. Now there are, for instance, two kinds of squirrel-cups—one variety chooses to grow on the north side of hills and ridges, and the other almost always on the south side."

"Oh, what are squirrel-cups?" said Primrose.

"Dear little early spring flowers—you'll see by-and-by, when we've had a little mild weather. I saw a pretty thing of that sort—talking of notions," Sam went on, "when I

was at Thornbrake. There was a beautiful wild flower in the woods there, called the chimaphila; but it never grew anywhere but in the woods, under the pine trees, and would not live in the garden at all. Well, three or four years before, Mr Austin had set out a young silver pine on his lawn; and at last it was growing well. And now a little bunch of chimaphilas had suddenly come to establish themselves at the foot of this one tree, standing there on the lawn all by itself. There they grew and bloomed in its shade."

"But, Sam, *how* did they come?" said Primrose, very much interested.

"Ah! that I can't tell you," said Sam. "Some seed may have been dropped there, or have lodged in the tree roots when it was dug up. But I suppose you might have planted bushels of chimaphila seed under any other tree on the lawn, and not one would have come up."

"Sam," said Lily, suddenly, "don't you think pink note-paper is a *great* deal more elegant than white?"

"Pink note-paper!" ejaculated Sam; and by way of answer, he caught up Primrose to his shoulder, and rushed out of the old shed and along the gravel walks at full speed to the house. Lily and Clover followed, laughing, and out of breath.

"Now, Sam! what did that mean?" said Lily, when he had put Primrose down in the sitting-room at her mother's side.

"It means—Good afternoon!" said her brother, walking off demurely.

"Well," said Lily, "I guess it's just as good he's gone, for you know, Clover, we've got to lay out our things for to-morrow. Mamma, what frocks shall we wear?"

"Mamma," said little Primrose, "if we go through Hicory

Corner, may we go just a *little* earlier, so as to get the watering pots? Three minutes would do, Sam said."

"Did Sam say that?" asked Mrs May, smiling; "I think he was greatly mistaken."

"No, mamma, not just that—Prim didn't understand," said Clover. "Sam said three minutes would not be too much. And oh, mamma, he's been telling us such beautiful things! where plants grow, and all that,—the differences between them. Mamma, do you think King David knew a great deal about flowers?"

"His son Solomon did," said Mrs May. "I don't know how it was with David. Why, love?"

"I thought he might," said Clover, blushing and hesitating a little, "You know, mamma, what he wrote: 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom has thou made them all.' And Sam was telling us such wonderful things. No one could have arranged it all but God."

"'He hath made everything beautiful in his time,'" answered her mother. "He maketh grass to grow upon the mountains, and herbs for the food of man.' 'O Lord my God, thou art very great!'"

CHAPTER IX.

NOTHING could be more perfect than the drive to Hiccorry Corner, with such double pleasure at the end of it. The day was as fine as possible, the roads fast getting into good spring order, and the horses trotted along admirably, their bright harness sparkling in the sun. Even the dark face of Hannibal on the box shone with satisfaction, and the three children were in a bounding state of delight. Lily, to be sure, was most entranced with the thought of spending a day with Maria Jarvis; while Prim's whole heart was in her watering pot; and Clover, as usual, brought business and pleasure into a very happy combination. She even found time (which the two others scarce did) to notice the dainty fringes of green grass that began to shew themselves here and there, and to see the blue birds, and the rich tint of the uncovered earth, and the last patch of snow lingering on the hills—thinking between whiles very earnestly of the proposed work at the tinman's, and of great possible advantage from the floral instructions of Maria Jarvis. Sam was of the party, to see the children safe to Chestnut Hill; but on the express understanding that he was in no way to interfere with their purchases at Hiccorry Corner.

"It's so delightful to do it all ourselves!" said Lily.
"You know, Sam, you are not even to advise us."

"Not I!" said Sam. "I have no such stock of good ad-

vice on hand that I can afford to waste it. I shall take myself off to the shoemaker's the minute I have set you down among the pint cups!"

"Does the tinman have pint cups too?" said Primrose.

"Pint cups, and quart cups, and all sorts of things. So if you change your mind, and want a nutmeg grater instead of a watering pot, you can have it!"

"I guess *I* shan't!" said Primrose, with one of her glad-some laughs. "But oh, Sam, would you get a blue watering pot—or a pink one?"

"Upon my word," replied Sam, doing his best to keep a grave face, "I don't know. It's a wonderfully puzzling question. I think, just for the novelty of the thing, I should choose a pink one—if I could find it! Unless, indeed, I should be fortunate enough to discover one of a delicate sky-blue!"

"Now, Sam, you are advising," said Lily.

"Truly I am not," honestly replied Sam. "As far from it as possible."

"Yes, blue would be beautiful!" said little Primrose, with such a grave, contemplative air that her brother laughed outright; and stooping down to kiss her, bade Hannibal drive to the tinman's just as fast as he could go.

"'Fraid little Missy won't find 'em *there*," said Hannibal, touching up his horses. "Missy can try—but tink de oder place best."

"What other place?" said Lily.

"De green-house, Miss Lily—old Scipio's green-house. Everybody at Hicory Corner know old Scip. But here's de tin-shop; mebbe little Missy find all she want here."

Not *all* she wanted. To do that, one must needs go about the world with far more moderate visions than those of pink

and sky-blue watering pots. Red ones, indeed, the tinman had—a dark brick red—and others of a dull lead colour; but Prim turned away from both in great disgust.

“Let’s go to the other place,” she whispered to Sam, who, forgetting all about the shoemaker’s, stood silently looking on. “*These* won’t do at all.”

“But wait one minute, please,” said Clover, examining the tinman’s shelves with her eyes. “Will you let me see that one with the *very* long spout, sir?”

“This ’ere long-nosed feller?” said the tinman, handing it down. “Well, I guess you might as well take it; nobody else don’t seem to. ’Taint of a kind nobody wants.”

“Why, Clover, what *would* you do with such a looking thing?” cried Lily.

Clover took the queer watering-pot in her hand and surveyed it. It was not very large, just a nice size, the pot itself; but the nose, or spout, was as long as three or four common ones put together; stretching itself out into the air, for no imaginable purpose but to see the world and be in the way. And as if that were not enough, just at the end, close by the rose, the long spout took a sudden sharp bend quite at right angles with the rest of its course; as if having set out to see the sky, it had suddenly resolved to study the earth first. There was so much spout, altogether, that as Clover held the pot in her hand it weighed quite down, and touched the floor.

“Sam, it wouldn’t do that if it was full of water, would it?” said Clover, looking up at him.

“No, then the pot itself would be heavy, and so balance the nose.”

“Wouldn’t it be convenient for watering distant plants,

so that one needn't step on the bed?" said Clover, with her face of grave consideration.

"Couldn't say whether 'twould or not," said the man. "That's what it's made for; and it's a first-rate article."

"I think I'll take it," said Clover.

"That lead-coloured thing!" said Lily, "with its long nose! And just look how fine the holes are in the end. Why, it would take the water a week to come out."

"These fine holes are excellent," said Sam; "they can hardly be too fine."

"Well, I don't think so," said Lily. "I don't want to be all day watering one plant. And the nose is all bent too."

"That's a purpose," said the tinman. "Saves water. When 'taint bent you just go pourin' it round between things."

"Prim, I see a blue one off there in the corner," said Lily, "How would you like that?"

"'Taint hardly a blue," said the tinman, bringing it forward; "leastways not a sky colour. And 'taint much of a pot neither. Spout's too big and holes too coarse."

"Now I like that," said Lily, handling the blue watering pot; the colour of which was indeed rather dark and heavy for the hue of truth. "The water'll come out all the quicker, and then one would get done. I guess I'll have this. It's the nicest we've seen."

"One likes a gentle shower, and t' other a pourin' rain," said the tinman, nodding at the two children. "Suit yourselves, and that'll suit me."

Sam paid for the watering pots in silence; and as he stood waiting for the change, little Prim's hand crept softly into his.

"Sam," she whispered, "do you think that'll be the *only* blue one?"

Sam lifted her up in his arms, and bore her away to the carriage.

"This is not a very pretty blue, Prim," he whispered, in return. "And if yours isn't blue—and you want it blue—I'll paint it blue myself!"

And away they drove in triumph to old Scip's, the long nose of Clover's watering-pot making constant endeavours to break through the brown paper and carry out its search after knowledge.

"To go visiting with such a thing in the carriage!" said Lily;—"what will Maria Jarvis think!"

"I don't know," said Clover, merrily; "but I dare say she'll tell me!"

Which was as near being a severe speech as often came from the gentle lips of Clover.

"And you are all suited but me!" said Primrose, her eyes beaming with thoughts of the pleasure to come, as they drew up before the little house that was half a green-house as well.

"All suited but you," said her brother, lifting her down; "so you can march in and ask for what you like."

"I think we won't get out," said Lily; "please don't, Clover! It takes so much time." And Clover yielded her own "please!" to Lily's without a word.

Primrose waited no urging, but walked straight up to the door and knocked, and became at once forgetful of all sub-lunary concerns. This was not the house door with its brass knockers, but the sash door of the green-house, through which green leaves and plants beckoned her lovingly. And as the door did not fly open with the sudden speed of Ali Baba's famous entrance, Prim began to gaze up at the leaves in turn, and at once, as I have said, lost remembrance of everything

else in the pretty sight. Soft geranium leaves, and the tall white flowers of a Calla and brilliant red blossoms of some other plant, were fairly entrancing; and Prim looked and looked, nor even heard Lily call to her to make haste. Then presently the sash-door stirred and opened, and Prim saw, instead of the geranium leaves, the figure of a little gray-headed black man—very black, and the hair very gray, but every dark wrinkle on the old face full of gentle pleasure. He bowed low to Sam, standing behind the child; but then all his attention came back to her.

"Little lady," he said, "come to see old Scip? What de little lady like to have? Jes' come right in and see."

And in Prim went, and the old man shut the door and limped slowly along his green-house walk past the beautiful flowers.

"Dere," he said, with a sweeping gesture of his hand, and turning round once more to Primrose, "little lady only say what she like, dat's all."

"Please, sir," said Primrose, gravely, "have you got any watering pots? Hannibal said so. And I can't find one."

"Little lady can't find a watering pot?" said old Scipio, with a broad smile. "Guess she can here—don't know, but see." And once more he limped off and opened a door into a sort of outer room, where he kept his empty flower pots, and then began to rummage behind this thing and under that, bringing forth every now and then some fresh tin specimens for Prim to see.

"How dis do now? little lady want it for de wash'woman, to sprinkle de clothes, hey?"

"Oh, no!" said Primrose, "we've got one for that. It's for myself."

"Little lady gwine to have a garden?" inquired the old man.

"Yes, sir," said Primrose, lifting the last specimen with great difficulty, "and I'm afraid this is too large. I'm going to have a garden and a great many flowers."

"Little lady want to water de flowers all herself?" said the old man, with one of his gentle smiles.

"Oh yes! all myself," said Primrose, "won't it be lovely? And you see, sir, I can hardly lift this."

"Little white blossom!" said old Scipio to himself as he moved away,— "ain't got nothing small enough for de child, no how! Guess I'll jes' give her Tidy's. Make another chile happy, dat's all—better so den rust." And with a smothered sigh he opened a cupboard in the wall, and brought out to view the very smallest and prettiest little watering pot that Primrose had ever seen, even in her dreams—a little fairy concern, that would hold about a pint of water; and, of all things in the world, it was painted pink on the inside, but without was a bright green.

Primrose was in a state of rapture, hugging the watering-pot up in her arms, and exclaiming in her soft way, and looking up at old Scipio with eyes too full of joy to see the drops that shone in his.

"Dere—dere!" he muttered to himself, turning hastily away, "she wid de Lord—what need to cry 'bout dat?"

Prim did not hear the words, but her heart felt something of the tone, and she was grave in a minute."

"Can you spare it, sir?" she said. "Have you got any more like it?"

"Yes, yes, dear! I'll spare it; no, dere ain't one like it in all de world. I'll spare it for de little white blossom.

Never thought I could before. Better so den rust," he repeated softly.

Prim held out her hand to the old gardener, making her lowest curtesy, and thanking him with her face yet more than her words, and then ran away to the carriage to shew her treasure, leaving Sam to finish the business. But it soon appeared that there was nothing for him to do.

"No, I couldn't; 'scuse me, sir, but I *couldn't* take noting for dat ere watering pot," said Scipio; "noting but de joy of seein' her once'n a while. *Couldn't* take money for Tidy's watering pot. She jes' like my Tidy. Yes," repeated old Scipio, looking tenderly after the carriage from which Prim waved her little hand to him, "she *jes'* like Tidy! Both de souls white!"

CHAPTER X.

CHESTNUT HILL was undoubtedly a great place. And it is equally not to be questioned, that there is often a wonderful beauty about great places, how ever much we may love little ones. Even now, when the great trees on the avenue showed only bare branches, or at most swelling buds, how beautiful it was ! Those same bare branches stretched themselves across the road in such wild, free fashion ; the old trunks were so gnarled and knotted, with here and there a hole suggestive of squirrels ; while the exquisite tracery of the smaller twigs and branches made such a lovely fretwork across the blue of the spring sky, that the drive up from the lodge to the great house itself was every inch a pleasure.

But if great places are beautiful, they are also peculiar ; everything knows its position. It is not Pegasus in pound, exactly, but it is certainly nature in training. No wandering tuft of grass infringes upon the smooth gravel outline of the road ; no golden buttercups and common daisies, spot the lawn,—they have been warned, like unruly children, “Keep off the grass !” There are not even the traces of yesterday’s wheels and hoofs upon the road,—to-day’s rake has made all ready for fresh impressions. No fallen tree branch, no little cluster of dead leaves whispering mournfully in a corner ; no drooping banner of foliage to envelop your coachmen’s head and then sweep, trailing, across the top of the carriage. The trees, like everything else, in such a place

submit to the laws of the Medes and Persians ; but happier than other things, in that they have to themselves a region of upper air, wherein to do as they like. So the red maples glowed with their bright blossoms, and the willows waved their soft catkins ; but down on the ground there were no flowers yet, chickweed would have been deemed an intruder, and the dandelion an upstart ; and it was too early in the season for greenhouse beauties to show their fair faces out of doors. Besides, the family were but just come up.

"How pretty it is!" said Clover, as they wheeled along over the smooth road.

"Very!" said Sam. "I wonder if I should like to roll upon that lawn."

"Why?" said Lily.

"I shouldn't know when I'd got over," said Sam, with a comical look. "But there is the house!" And the children involuntarily straightened up, and were upon their good behaviour at once.

Only the watering pot!—for I grieve to say that the laws of the Medes and Persians had not the slightest effect upon the long nose of Clover's watering pot. All the way from Hicory Corner it had been hard at work upon its wrappings ; calling upon every stone in the road, and every friendly jolt to help. And now as Hannibal brought his horses round the carriage sweep at a fast trot, the nose of the watering-pot burst through the last hindrance, and at once directed its attention full in the face of Mrs Jarvis herself, as she sat at the window.

"Dear me!" was the lady's first exclamation, "what strange people the Mays are! Letting their carriage go about the country with a whole invoice of tin things, for all the world like a pedlar's cart. Nice looking children

though, if they were only dressed. Well, every one to his mind ! Go and receive your friends, Maria."

Miss Maria danced out of the room and down the steps, just in time to meet the little plain dark merinoes that jumped out of the carriage ; beholding which, Maria could not refrain from an admiring glance down at her own pink silk. But happily unconscious of the vast superiority of silk over merino, nay, even thinking (if they thought of it at all) that for cool weather merino bore the bell ; and not having heard one word about the invoice of tin things, the three young faces were as cloudless as the sky.

"Oh, I'm *delighted* to see you !" said Maria. "What *have* you got there under your coachman's feet ?"

"It's our watering pots," explained Lily, with a reproachful look at her sister. "At least, that's Clover's. Mine is under the seat. We're going to have gardens, you know, and"—

But Miss Maria rushed up the steps and into the hall, and though the little Mays followed as fast as they could, or as they liked to follow in a strange house, they would have heard nothing had not Maria kindly raised her voice for their benefit, exclaiming as she burst into the parlour—

"Mamma, it's their watering pots !"

"Watering pots !" Mrs Jarvis repeated. "Get off my dress, Maria,—I am surprised at you ! It seems as if you never would learn dignity of manner, at this rate. What have you done with your friends ? Ah, here they come."

Or rather, there they stood,—a little timidly now, and blushing for their watering pots and themselves alike, grouped together in the hall, with Prim's head turned far round to look after Sam. But Sam and the offending tin

things had driven off in company, and a distant crack of Hannibal's whip was all that could be heard.

Maria made another rush into the hall, and brought the little strangers in, and presented them to her mother, adding various small pieces of information out of her own head.

"Lily's the clever one, mamma, but Clover's the oldest. And Prim's hair curls naturally. And it's so cold down at their house, that they always wear thick frocks."

"Maria, if you never speak of anything you do not know, you will talk a good deal less," said her mother, with some asperity. And then she welcomed the children very kindly, and took them into a little room on the other side of the hall, where they could lay off their things, her practised eye taking note the while of the exquisite neatness and finish of those "thick frocks," and of the delicate white clearness of the little neck ruffles.

"What a superb laundress you must have!" said Mrs Jarvis, arranging Prim's dress. "Absolute perfection." And with that she dismissed the children, bidding them enjoy themselves as much as they could, and not let Maria tire them out before luncheon.

"Shew them all your things, Maria;" she said, "your new brooch and bracelet they'll enjoy, I daresay."

"And books! Oh, have you got many books?" said Clover as they ran upstairs.

"Yes, I've got a good many," said Maria carelessly. "Some people will give one books, you know. There's my aunt Celestia,—she always says, 'Maria, I've brought you a new volume to peruse; and I hope it will do you good.' But it never does, you know, because I never do peruse it," added Maria laughing. "It's never the sort I like. And

cousin William, *he* always gives me books. Mamma don't, she knows better. Just see here, what a bracelet she gave me last birthday,—that was a week ago. And the brooch was from papa. This other bracelet, the blue enamel, I had for Christmas. What do they give you at home?"

"Books, very often," said Clover, while Lily stood silent, with the blue enamel bracelet in her hand. "And beautiful curious things, shells and pictures; and papa gave me a magnifying glass. The last thing he gave me was some splendid new tools, and money to buy flower seeds."

"And oh, we've sent our lists!" said Primrose; "and Sam says the seeds may come any day, unless there are fifty people to be served first."

"Why do you have to buy your flower seeds?" said Maria. "When I want any I just go to William Stubbs—that's our gardener—and get as many as I choose. He has every sort in the world, you know."

"And then do you sow them?" said Lily, looking at the bracelet, and feeling as if everybody had everything at Chestnut Hill.

"Sometimes I do," said Maria, "but they never come up."

"Then they can't be Mr Vick's seeds," said Primrose.

"I don't know whose they are," said Maria, "but they never come up when *I* sow 'em. They have to for William, I suppose. See there—have you got any boots with tassels? Aren't they splendid?"

"But don't you ever read any books?" said Clover, going back to the former subject, while Lily fell into another reverie over the tassels.

"Oh yes, I read stories when I have got 'em," said Maria.

"Novels, you know, and such things. I wouldn't give a pin for a story where the people don't get married. It's stupid. There—that's the luncheon bell! Come along, girls, I'm sure you must be starved. I always am. And then by and by I'll show you Sarah's things. She's going away to-day."

Downstairs went the children, hurried along by the hungry Maria, and into the dining room where the luncheon table was set out. It was so much of a "set out," indeed, that the little Mays thought it looked quite like a nice dinner. Soup, and cold meat, and cake, and chocolate, and tea, and fruit, and bread and butter. The children were placed at one end of the table, while three or four embroidered ladies sat round Mrs Jarvis at the other; and in the middle distance was Maria's grown up brother, (how unlike Sam! Primrose thought,) and two or three younger boys. These last helped themselves to all they could reach by standing on tiptoe, picked crumbs and raisins from the cake basket, and made faces now and then at the little Mays. It is true that Jack was also somewhat given to faces; but then, as Lily remarked afterwards, Jack's faces meant something, and he didn't make them at strangers—two very important points of difference. However, the luncheon went on quietly enough, till the boys had taken the last oranges, and their departure, and Mrs Jarvis had finished her chocolate, and sat considering the three little strangers from a high social point of view. And then, merely remarking with a smile to some of the ladies round her, "what a difference there was among children," she left the table; and the children were free to do what they liked.

"Now what would you like to see first?" said Maria.

"We have a great many things, I suppose, that you haven't at your house. There's the pheasants, and all the green-houses, and the Chinese puzzle, and all Sarah's dresses."

"Oh, the greenhouses, please!" said Clover. "But how many are there?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Maria; "a dozen, I guess, more or less. They're grape houses, you know, part of 'em; and the fern room and everything."

"Maria, what are pheasants?" said little Primrose.

"They're nothing but birds," said Maria,— "gold and silver ones. But some people like to look at 'em. We can go round that way if you choose."

"Gold and silver birds!" said Primrose.

"No, nonsense!" said Miss Maria, "gold and silver *pheasants*! We don't live in the Arabian Nights, child; and my father says it's a pity we don't; it would be so easy, he says, to pick diamonds off the trees. If they were gold and silver birds, I can tell you, Sarah'd have 'em on her head in no time."

They went "that way," to where the pretty pheasants, with their shining plumage, lived in prison because of it, like some other fine birds; and Primrose pitied them so much that she had hardly time to admire: and then on to the greenhouses, which were much more satisfactory. William Stubbs was going the rounds, giving a touch here and a direction there; and he let the children go with him. First, through the grape-houses, one after another, and all different; for while in one the brown vine stems showed hardly a sign of life, in the next the full buds were swelling and bursting out—"breaking," as Mr Stubbs said. These two houses were cool, but in the next it felt like summer,

and the vines were in full leaf, and the house was filled with the delicious fragrance of their flowers. And in the next, the fruit was already set, and the clusters of green grapes hung upon the vines like a rich embroidery. The grape-houses were delightful, but the greenhouses and hothouses were bewildering. Such wild, rich, gorgeous plants ; and on the other hand, some that were just exquisite for sweetness : orchid blossoms that were like huge snow-flakes suspended in mid air, and great cactus blooms that glowed with the changing light of the bed of a wood fire. Strangers were they all, "distinguished foreigners," from Africa or Japan or Mexico. And it did not appear that anybody would ever be able to make their acquaintance, except Mr Stubbs. When Clover asked eagerly—

"Oh, what is that, sir?"

Mr Stubbs said—

"That is *echino-cactus xiphacanthus*,"—an introduction that of course no one could do anything with. Or if Primrose clasped her hands in wonder before some pendant air beauty, Mr Stubbs would say carelessly, "Yes, it's a pretty thing ; *aspedistria lucida variegata* : " and he might as well have given the name of a Polish prince at once. But I am not sure that the strange outlandish names did not, on the whole, heighten the effect ; giving a strange air of illusion and wonder to everything, and surrounding Mr Stubbs himself with a sort of lingual halo. For what sort of a man must he be who could live on terms of familiarity with a fern named "*athyrium filix fœmina frizella*?" The children looked from the fern to him, with awe-struck doubt as to which of the two was the greatest wonder. And when at last Maria Jarvis got them away "to see Sarah's dresses,"

Primrose saw everything across the white blossoms of the air plant, and Clover in the glow of the resplendent cactus ; and Lily, I am afraid, saw just the dresses, and nothing else.

So the visit ended joyously ; and the three children drove home in a state of delight that was hardly kept in bounds by the united efforts of Sam and the carriage.

CHAPTER XI.

It was so late when the carriage reached home that night that Mrs May would not let the children sit up to talk a bit, but sent them all off to bed at once; and even the watering pots were left tied up till morning. But as soon as the birds were fairly astir, and the sunbeams gleaming across the brown fields and rail fences, the house, too, was filled with a little hum of business and pleasure. Not too quiet a hum either; for it does now and then happen that wide-awake children forget other people's slumbers; and Lily and Clover and Primrose ran about the hall, and laughed and talked and sang, in happy unconsciousness that there was such a thing as sleep in the whole world. It was a pleasant disturbance after all; Mrs May found no fault with it up-stairs; and though the door stood open into the breakfast room, where Sam sat with his books, nobody got up to shut it. Indeed you could even see upon the student's face now and then a smile which was certainly called forth by no treatise on astronomy that ever was printed.

Jack was in the hall, helping the confusion, and making himself, as Lily said, "generally useless;" though indeed there was little to do but unpack the watering pots and scatter the packing paper about in every direction.

"So you had a grand time yesterday?" said Jack, looking critically with one eye through the long nose of Clover's watering pot.

"Splendid!" said Lily. "Only I wish we had gone there before we sent for our seeds,—then we could have got something worth while; air-plants and things."

"But those air-plants wouldn't grow in our garden," said Clover.

"Yes, they would; they *must* like fresh air, child. The wonder is, how they can live in that close place. It almost smothered *me*."

"I didn't mind it," said Clover, "it was so very interesting. I suppose that was meant for the natural climate of the plants."

"I'm sure I don't know what it was meant for, but I know it was suffocating," said Lily. "Jack, just think—Maria Jarvis's sister has a gold bracelet made just like a snake, with green enamel scales and two diamond eyes."

"Has she, indeed?" said Jack. "Ha!"

"Yes," said Lily, "and you needn't say 'ha!' either, for you never saw anything so splendid."

"Haven't I, though?" said Jack. "Why, I've seen the real thing."

"What's the real thing?" said Lily, slightly offended.

"You just tell Maria Jarvis, with my compliments," said Jack, screwing up his eyes as before, "that next summer you'll beat her sister all to nothing; for you'll have *real* snakes in your garden."

"Jack! how horrid!" said Lily. "What do you mean?"

"Yes, put down my watering pot, and talk and look like a rational boy," said Clover. "What *do* you mean?"

"Just that," said Jack, coolly. "Real snakes, with real scales, and shining eyes, and a tongue that'll run out and in at you so!"— And Jack made his little unruly member

play about in a way that was very unruly indeed. The three children stood aghast !

"Then there'll be earth worms," continued Jack, seeing the impression he had made ; "long, slimy, wriggling red things, coming right up out of the ground before you know where you are. And it's no sort of use to cut 'em in two with your spade, for each piece just grows out into a new earth worm, and so you only double the quantity."

There was another minute of dismayed silence, and then Primrose darted away up-stairs to her mother.

"Jack," said Clover, "you ought not to frighten Primrose. She's such a little thing ! and you know she can't bear even the sight of a caterpillar."

"She'd better quit gardening, then, before she begins," said Jack decisively. "I say, Clover, how much did you give a yard for the nose of this watering pot ?"

"Ah, here's mamma !" said Lily. "Mamma, I was only telling Jack about Sarah Jarvis's beautiful bracelet—made *just* like a snake, mamma, with scales and all !"

"I am glad it is not mine," said Mrs May, with a slight shiver. "And was Jack quite lost in admiration ?"

"No, indeed, mamma," said Clover ; "but he told us some very unpleasant things about what we should have in our gardens next summer."

"Snakes, mamma !" said little Primrose, clasping her mother's hand, and looking up appealingly. "And earth worms !"

"They are not very pretty things, certainly, to my eyes," said Mrs May, with a smile, as she sat down and took the little girl on her lap ; "but to a robin, Prim, the earth worms are extremely attractive—quite as much so as oysters are to you ! And the worst thing they will ever do in your

garden will be to eat up a leaf now and then. You can bear that, I hope?"

"Yes, mamma," said Prim, with a long sigh; "but I didn't want to have anything in my garden that wasn't *beautiful*."

"Beautiful they are, in one sense," said her mother, "with the beauty of perfect fitness for their life—the wonderful make and adjusting of every part."

"And the snakes, mamma?" said Prim.

"They have that same perfection and finish, like every one of God's creatures," said Mrs May; "and they have often, too, great beauty of colour. Still, I do not like snakes, Prim, I must confess; but I would much rather see a real one than wear such a snake bracelet on my arm, if that is any comfort."

"Mamma, mamma!" said Lily.

"Jack, what have you been telling these children?" said his mother.

"A little possible truth, mamma—slightly high-coloured."

"Ah, please to tell them nothing but positive truth for the future; and remember, young eyes are not skilled in colours."

"I don't believe there'll be a snake seen in your garden all summer," said Sam, coming out of the breakfast room; "and if there is, I'll shew you how fast he can run!"

"Oh, have they got feet?" said Primrose.

"You'll see, if one comes," said her brother. "And then we can study it all out, and learn how a snake moves *without* feet. The earth worms too; why, Prim, they're ten times as curious as your Chinese puzzle. I dare say we shall see some of them to-day, for I mean to begin digging this very morning."

"In our gardens?" cried Lily.

"To be sure. I've tried the ground, and it will work."

There was nothing to do after that but despatch breakfast as soon as possible, to be ready for digging; and all disturbed thoughts were brushed away. Sam went off to the tool-house and came back with a great spade on his shoulder nearly as big as the three little spades put together, and Lily followed, dragging a rake of corresponding size.

"Why *don't* you take our tools, Sam," she said, "and not these great ugly things? These aren't pleasant."

"Yes, and suppose I came against a stone and broke one of them," said Sam, "how pleasant *that* would be! I don't know what's in this ground yet; I haven't proved it."

And Sam threw off his coat as if he meant the proving should be an earnest one.

"You'll catch cold," said Clover.

"Not I! What with exploring the ground, and giving you a lecture on digging, I shall be warm enough. But where am I to begin?"

"I think you had better begin with mine," said Lily, promptly. "It's the largest, you know, and so you can give us a good long lecture."

Sam laughed a little, and shook his head.

"It's high time your garden was dug, Lily," he said; "that hedge wants planting badly."

But he strode away down the hill toward Lily's patch as he spoke, with the spade on his shoulder, and the young ones trooped after him. Jack mounted the fence, and the others stood here and there on the gravel walk to listen and look, and Sam began his work and his lecture together.

"The object of digging the ground, young ladies," he said, "is to bring it all to a fine, soft state, free from lumps and hard places, so that the light and air can make their way down into it, and the smallest roots of your plants can wander just which way they like best."

"Do roots wander?" said Clover.

"They're the greatest travellers I know, for their size," said Sam; "finding their way all about, after water, and food, and whatever else the pretty plant above ground may need. But then you must give them a fair chance, for each likes to go its own road."

"What queer things you do talk!" said Lily.

"All true," said her brother, measuring off the little patch and dividing it carefully in two. "Some roots, for instance, like to grow straight down into the ground; these are called tap-roots. And unless the ground is dug *very* deep, they have a poor time of it. The tap-root sets off on its travels and presently comes to a stone; well, it either crooks round the stone, or else it forks and goes both sides of it. But its strength is divided too, and its beauty is gone. I have seen radishes that were shaped as much like a breakfast-fork as anything. The poor root wanders on again, and by and by meets a great clod of unbroken earth, and then it gives up, discouraged. No use to try any further, no use to think of growing any more; it just stands still till the end of the season, and comes out of the ground at last a little, ugly, crooked thing, and good for nothing. Just because the ground was not half dug."

"I guess *ours* will be dug!" said Prim.

"Sam, what do you divide the patch so for?" said Lily.

"I'll tell you presently," said Sam, going on with his measuring. "Then other roots are fibrous, like a bunch of

little delicate threads ; and they like to creep all about, near the surface but out of sight ; and if you wall them in with stones or hard ground, the plant will be sickly and miserable all its life, or else die outright. Just as Prim would if I should put her in a cage and never let her stir more than three inches from home.

Prim twisted herself about as if the very idea was uncomfortable.

"I'd like to dig too," she said.

"And so you shall," said her brother. "I'll go over the three gardens first, to break up the ground once thoroughly, and then whoever likes may dig it after me. And now to begin."

CHAPTER XII.

"Now don't ask too many questions," said Sam, as he stuck his spade into the ground, "but look on and learn. See if you cannot find out for yourselves why I divide the ground into two parts."

"It's a great deal easier to have you tell us," said Lily.

"And a great deal easier for you to forget, if I do," said Sam. "No, I will not answer any questions until I have dug at least one square yard."

And with that he began to work in earnest, but in a way that seemed very mysterious. All across the end of one of his two divisions Sam dug a sort of trench, taking out each spadeful of earth and laying it neatly on the end of the other division so as to form a ridge. Then leaving division number two to take care of itself for a while, he went back to the line of earth next his trench and dug that up—turning each spadeful quite over into the trench, breaking the lumps with his spade, and bringing it to a fine smoothness; and leaving also a new trench to receive the next line of earth. But all this time the other division was left to itself, with the ridge of earth at one end.

"Why don't you dig straight across?" said Lily, when trench after trench had been filled with the pulverised earth. "There you've left all that ridge. What will you ever do with it?"

"What should I do without it?" said Sam, digging on.

"I know, I know!" said Clover, joyfully. "Sam, please stop a minute and listen. Isn't this the way? You'll dig down quite to the end of this division, and then to fill the last trench you'll take earth from across the lower end of this *other* division. And then you'll begin to dig that one down there, and dig on and on back to the top again. And then when you come to the last trench of all there'll be the ridge of earth to fill it. Isn't that right?"

"Right as a glove," said Sam, looking pleased. "You'll make a gardener yet."

"But Sam," said little Primrose, "if you were digging a great field you'd have to carry the earth clear across to make the ridge."

"Not so, little sister," said Sam. "I should never be digging a great field; fields are always ploughed, Prim; but if it were a large piece of ground instead of a small one, I should divide it into many parts instead of two—only taking care always to have an even number. Two divisions, you see, take care of each other; but if I had a third or a fifth or a seventh all by itself, there would be no place to lay the earth from my first trench, and all I could do would be to carry or wheel each spadeful round to the other end."

"It's quite beautiful!" said Clover, looking lovingly at the brown earth.

"Well, I didn't know digging was so very easy," said Lily. "I don't see why people ever have lumps in their gardens. The earth seems to crumble right up when you touch it."

"Appearances are peculiar things," said her brother, with a smile. "Don't you want to try how much they are worth?"

"What do you mean now?" said Lily.

"Get your spade and help me to dig."

"May I?" cried Lily, eagerly.

"Certainly; it is your garden."

Away flew Lily after her spade. Sam set his in the ground and stopped to rest.

"In this way of dividing the ground, Clover," he said, "you must be careful of two things: first, to dig your trenches straight; and, secondly, to make quite sure that the edge of one division is dug quite into the edge of another, else you will have a balk all across your bed."

"What is a balk?" said Clover.

"That is what some gardeners call a bit of undug ground left in the midst of that which has been dug."

"It balks the plants, so they can't grow," put in Jack.

"Isn't Jack smart?" said Clover softly to Sam. "But Sam, if you are not too tired, will you just dig one more row across quietly before Lily comes? I understand about the trenches, but there's something else I want to see."

"I'm not a bit tired," said her brother; and away he went across the strip of earth again, while Clover looked on more intently than before, watching what Lily had thought so "easy." She saw that the earth by no means "crumbled right up" of its own accord; on the contrary some of it was very obstinate. Sam's spade went into it, and through it, and into it again, with a light skill before which most of the lumps presently gave way, but now and then there was one so hard that nothing but a good sound tap from the flat of the spade reduced it to order; and every large stone that shewed its head was picked out and thrown aside.

"Sam," said Clover, suddenly, "why do you turn every spadeful of earth quite over, so that the top goes to the bottom?"

"Why, just to bring the bottom to the top," said Sam, pushing back his hat. "Then all the soil by turns gets the benefit of the sun and air, and it grows mellow, and more fit for the plants."

"Here comes Lily!" shouted Jack. "Now there'll be sights!" And Jack settled himself on the fence with renewed satisfaction as Lily came rushing down the hill, spade and rake in hand.

"No bonnet, Lily?" said her brother, looking at the uncovered head.

"Oh! I guess I dropped it in the tool-house," said Lily. "Never mind; I don't care for the sun."

"And no shoes nor gloves, and a light pink frock," remarked Jack from the fence.

"Be quiet," said Lily. "I've got shoes."

"But not our garden shoes, you know, Lily," said little Primrose.

"Our garden shoes!" said Lily. "I wonder how many pair I can wear at once! Where shall I begin, Sam?"

"Choose your place," said her brother, stepping aside.

"I suppose I may as well begin right here where you left off," said Lily, plunging right across the soft bed with more zeal than prudence, and covering her bright house boots with soil. Clover gave a little cry of dismay.

"You should never walk across newly-dug ground if it is possible to help it," remarked Sam; "for it packs the earth again, and you lose your labour."

"Does it? Never mind, I can dig it up again. Now for it." And Lily struck her spade vehemently into the ground, but with such a glancing slope, that all the effect was to pare off a handful of earth and throw it high into the air.

"Splendid! first-rate!" exclaimed Jack, clapping his hands. "Quite a superb display!"

Sam did not laugh, but stood by to give counsel.

"If you set your spade straight down, Lily," he said, "instead of at such an angle, and put your foot on the cross-piece and press it down, and then draw the handle down towards you—so—and lift the spade gently up, the earth will come up smoothly with it, instead of flying off in a tangent. Don't try to take up too much at first."

Which wise advice Lily disregarded; measuring off for herself a spadeful of such extra size that she could not stir it, and was obliged to pull her spade ignominiously out, with no load at all.

"Easy, isn't it?" said Jack from the fence. "Gets along so fast!"

"Take time," said Sam, kindly; "and take a little at a time. There—that is better; now turn it well over into the trench." And Lily, stimulated by the cheerful tone, really contrived to get up a small spadeful of earth and overset it into the trench. She was much elated.

"I do believe I can do it all myself now," she said. "And I'd much rather do it myself. So you may go, Sam—you needn't dig any more for me."

A queer little incredulous smile shone in Sam's eyes, but he took his coat and began to put it on.

"Very good for me," he said, looking at his watch. "I have something to do in the house. Jack, so have you. And as for you, little Prim, your only chance of a ride on my shoulders before dinner is the present occasion—so come."

"Yes, you may all go," said Lily, whose next venture, to say truth, had been much less successful. "You had

better not wait, Clover, because it 'll take me a little while to finish this bed, and you may get tired standing."

Such extreme consideration and competency was too much for Clover; she went away without a word or a suggestion; and Jack tumbled up the slope in a state of exhilaration that could find no other sufficient outlet.

Left alone to herself in the brisk spring wind, Lily went through a variety of experiments in digging that cannot even be described. Every possible way to do it—or rather *not* to do it—she tried, except only that slow and patient way which Sam had enjoined. Sometimes pushing the spade down by main force, quite neglecting the help of her foot on the cross-piece; sometimes trying for great spadefuls that she could not stir, then shoveling off small ones that were worth nothing; scraping, chopping, pounding—there was hardly anything Lily did not make her spade do, except dig. And the result was quite in keeping. Sam's work lay there, smooth and neat; even Lily's hasty footsteps had not destroyed its pretty appearance. But beyond that! The trench had disappeared entirely, and the line of digging was now as crooked as a rail fence, but far less regular, while no words can tell the roughness of the ground. An army of stones seemed to have started up out of ambush, and the earth to have all turned into lumps; while the ups and downs of the surface would have made a severe kind of hill country for any small race of creatures.

"I guess I can rake it smooth," Lily said to herself, surveying the lumps and hollows. But as she came back with the rake from where it had lain on the grass a new thought struck her. Had she really dug only *that*? In the heat of the work she had scarcely stopped to notice her progress—it would take her a little while, she had said—and now the

whole she had done, bad as it was, looked like but a few inches by Sam's broad, smooth strip. And there, at this very minute, was the dressing-bell for dinner.

"Never mind," was her first thought, "my frock's clean. I guess it'll do for dinner to-day, and I just want to dig a little bit more." But a single glance showed her part at least of the state of affairs. The "light pink dress," as Jack had truly called it, had mud stains enough for a ploughman's frock ; the neat morocco boots were covered and clogged with earth ; the stockings above shewed a happy blending of all possible shades of brown ; and as to her hands, if they were to be scrubbed clean even by tea time, it was best to begin without much delay. Lily stood silent and still, remembering even in the midst of her discomfort Sam's kindness in keeping Jack away. Slowly and soberly she went along the walk to the tool-house, and then rather hastily up to her room ; but the dinner bell had rung, and every one else was helped, before Lily came to the table ; her face and neck and hands burned with the sunbeams, but reddened yet more just then with the thought of her first day's work in her garden.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was not the fashion in Mr May's house for the children to take the lead in conversation. A strange, old-time notion prevailed there, that those who had lived longest in the world knew best what to talk about ; or at least "had the right of way," as they say on the railroads. So, though the children were always allowed to express their opinions and make known their wishes in proper time and place, it was well understood that neither opinions nor wishes were of importance enough to take position in the front rank of affairs, but must wait, nicely bridled and held in, until their turn came. And thus it fell out to-day that dinner was over and the dessert set on, and even that nearly finished, before a word could be said about Lily and her strange appearance. Mr and Mrs May were discussing some matter of which the young ones understood not a word, but to which Sam gave his undivided attention ; and the children were obliged to keep pretty quiet, and to speak softly—when they spoke at all—to each other. Jack, indeed, contrived to say a good deal without speaking a word,—knitting his eyebrows, and rolling up his eyes, and making all sorts of inconceivable signs of wonder and admiration ; which Lily could not help seeing, do what she would. Little Primrose whispered,—

"Oh, Lily ! did you really get it done ?" and Lily deigned no reply whatever either to words or looks, but went on eating her dinner as fast as she could ; so that Clover, really

anxious to know the history of such a strange looking face and neck, yet ventured to ask no questions, but just shewed her sympathy by helping Lily to everything she wanted, and that Clover herself could reach.

At length Mr May, having finished both his discussion and his apple, found leisure to notice the children, and very soon saw the contrast between the delicately clean hands of Clover and the red, imperfectly scrubbed ones of Lily. Mr May was very particular about hands.

"Had you no soap and water in your room, Lily?" he asked.

"Yes, papa—but—I couldn't get it off!" Lily stammered out with much difficulty.

"It's 'these diggings,' papa," explained Jack.

"Oh! But I thought they were to have gloves?" said Mr May, looking across the table at his wife.

"And they have," she said, with a smile.

"Useful gloves they must be," said Mr May, in an ironical tone. "And the sun-bonnet also,—extremely valuable."

"Papa, I didn't wear them," said Lily, in whose eyes the drops were gathering fast.

"I inferred as much."

"It was the first time, you know, papa," pleaded Clover, her own eyes growing very misty. "And Lily was so eager—and I think she forgot all about it till she was quite down there."

"No," said Lily, resolutely, "no, papa; I only forgot for a minute—just till I was three steps down the hill. And then I was in a hurry, and I wouldn't go back."

"No excuse at all is the best one that ever was made," said Mr May, his good-humoured smile coming back on the instant. "The whole truth always. But believe me, my

dear, *hurry* is a bad digger and planter and everything else ; let *time* help you another day. And be content to have tiger-lilies in your garden,—don't transform yourself into one."

"Papa, I don't feel cross," said Lily, understanding the "tiger" in a very literal way. "At least, I didn't till Jack made faces at me."

"No, no," said Mr May laughing. "That is not what I meant. A tiger-lily, my dear, is a fiery red flower, with black spots. Come away, Jack, and let your sister alone. I have an errand for you."

Poor Lily! such a picture of herself was too much ; and her father's amused tone gave it full effect, and was even worse than Jack's laugh. She controlled herself just for one minute, until they were both out of the room, but the next found her on her knees, sobbing out her sorrows in Mrs May's lap.

"I hate digging!" she burst forth, "and the spade, and the garden, and everything else! And I don't care who has it all, for I don't want it."

"Oh Lily!" exclaimed little Primrose. "Not your beautiful garden?"

"No!"

"But where will you put your seeds?" said Primrose, while Clover stood silent and sad.

"In the fire!"

"Poor Lily!" said Mrs May, gently stroking the head that moved restlessly on her lap ; "she is tired and troubled, Prim—don't talk to her just now. When one is troubled, you know, nothing seems pleasant."

Lily burst into a gentler fit of tears at that, seizing her mother's hand and smothering it with kisses ; and Clover

drew Primrose softly away to the other side of the room. Sam was standing by the mantelpiece, but he did not speak a word ; and the silence was first broken by Lily herself.

"Mamma, I didn't speak truth—I don't hate my garden—I love it, oh, so much ! And I tried so hard, and I was so disappointed !" and the hot tears dropped down again very fast.

"Yes, I know all about that," said her mother, soothingly ; "I watched you all the time, Lily, from my window."

"Oh mamma, why didn't you call me?" said Lily.

"I thought you were learning so much that I would not interfere."

"Mamma, are you laughing at me?" said Lily, raising her head.

"No, indeed."

"But I think you were mistaken, mamma ; I don't think I learned anything," said Lily, sighing. "I dug it *dreadfully*—and so little !"

"Who thought she could dig her garden without help and without teaching?" said Mrs May.

"Why—oh, is that what you mean? Yes, I did learn *that*," said Lily.

"And you learned the value of a spade like my grandmother's needles," said her mother, smiling.

"Ah, mamma ! how well you know me," said Lily. "You thought what was coming."

"Yes, I thought. And you have learned, too, that the way to enjoy one's garden is not to stay in it the whole morning."

"Yes, indeed," said Lily, laying her face wearily on her mother's knee. "I'm as tired as I can be."

"A little lesson on self conceit, a little lesson on patient painstaking, a little lesson on self control," said Mrs May. "That is the morning's work, Lily."

"Yes, mamma. And a great big lesson on obedience; for if I had worn my sun-bonnet and gloves, papa would not have called me a tiger-lily."

"Mamma," said Sam, "if lessons are over, may we have a little play? I have a new game in my pocket."

"Play away," said his mother, "if you will only let me look on."

"A new game!" cried Lily, forgetting all her sorrows in a moment.

"Yes. Come, Clover, come, Prim;" and Sam drew up a chair to his mother's side, and the children clustered round him. Sam put on a face of great importance, and took out of his pocket a rather large package, carefully wrapped up and tied.

"Now," he said, "before we begin our game I must distribute the contents of my package." And carefully opening one end Sam took out a very small paper bag with something printed on the outside.

"*Convolvulus minor*—mixed," said Sam, reading it off. "Who is the happy owner of this?"

"Oh, it's our seeds! our seeds!" cried Lily, while little Primrose clapped her hands and said, "Oh, mamma!" and Clover's face flushed all over with pleasure. "Sam, you're the very best fellow that ever was! That's mine, Sam—give it to me, quick!"

Sam laughed, and tossed the little packet into her lap; and Lily looked at it, and read the name with eyes that fairly shone with joy.

"*Convolvulus minor*," she repeated. "Yes, you dear little beauty, you belong to me. What comes next, Sam?"

"*Ipomœa grandiflora superba*," said Sam, taking out another packet.

"Oh!" cried Primrose, with a long-drawn breath of intense gratification, "that's mine!" And no packet of gold dust could have been so received and handled and smiled over.

"*'Hyacinth beans,'*" read out Sam, turning with bright eyes to his patient looking oldest little sister, standing so quiet at his side, but with every finger trembling with eagerness. And how they closed upon the little packet, and felt the beans through the paper, and knew they had never handled such riches before!

Then followed "*zinnias*," again for Clover, and "*asters*" for Lily, and "*sweet peas*" for Prim; and then one and another, through the whole fragrant list—or three lists—until each little heart was as full of happiness as it well could hold.

"Mamma," said Primrose, "they feel so different! Some are hard and stick all out, and some don't feel as if there was anything at all inside. Do you think they can be empty, mamma?"

"Listen," said Mrs May, shaking one of the "empty" papers at Prim's ear.

"Oh, I hear them! It's not empty! The seeds go rattle, rattle!" cried Prim. "And look, mamma, when I hold it up to the light, so, I can see such little, little seeds running all about."

"Such pretty papers!" said Lily, admiringly; "white ground and pink names. But how *can* some of these seeds

grow? They look just like dust. Mamma, what makes seeds so different?"

"What makes plants so different? At the command of the Lord 'the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed *after his kind*.'"

"How wonderful it is!" said Clover, using her favourite phrase. "But I wish I understood *how* such little dust-seeds can grow to make plants."

"That will be good work for a rainy day," said Sam. "To-day we must put some of these in the earth, so that they *may* grow."

"Mamma, will all the little seeds make little plants, and all the big seeds big plants?" said Primrose.

"You will see. If I were you," said her mother, "I would write down a description of each kind of seed, and then of the sort of sprout or leaf that each sends up first, and then of the full-sized plant."

"Oh, that will be perfectly delightful!" said Clover. "I like to write about things. Mamma, dear, what a grand person you are to *think*!"

"Ay, and to do," said Sam, wrapping his arms, child-fashion, round her neck. "But now, children, I must go to work for a while for myself, and then we'll go out to the workshop and sow seeds."

However, the seeds did not get planted that afternoon. Sam's work held him a long time; and then when at last he came into the bright sitting-room, the last sunbeams were gilding and touching up the end of the day, and Sam pronounced it "quite too late."

"It's too bad!" Lily declared.

"But we've got our beautiful seeds to look at," said Primrose.

"And I want to study the catalogue a *great* deal more," said Clover.

"And to conclude," said Sam, "we are not ready to sow the seeds, if it was ever so early. We must have some leaf mould to mix with the earth first, and to get that we must go to the woods. And to do *that* we *must* wait till another day. But it's time we were busy now. Do you know what Spring is about?"

Do you know what Spring is doing?
Little children, do you know
She has carried off the icicles,
And swept away the snow?
The soft air comes to fan her,
And the birch hangs out his banner,
And the squirrel cup peeps boldly from his dry leaf bed below.

Do you see what Spring is doing?
Little children do you see?
She is bringing home the blue bird
And waking up the bee.
With her warm and dewy fingers,
Where the scent of spices lingers,
She is touching every leaf bud on every forest tree.

As she works, the bare brown mountains
Tremble with a purple light;
Quick she spreads her flowery carpet,—
(Green the ground, instead of white,)—
Here is windflower, the fairy,
And chickweed—just less airy;
And a sunny bank all rarely with violets bedight.

Columbine in bright attire,
Hangs her head among the rocks;
And the little blue Houstonia
Tints the carpet in whole blocks.
Dandelion, sonsy fellow!
Takes on him to "do the yellow;"
And the moss pink is on duty in the pinkest of pink frocks.

Do you hear what Spring is doing?—
Hush!—I cannot tell the half;
On one side a robin's whistle,
On the next a sparrow's laugh;—
Here in council on the weather,—
There rejoicing all together,
As to Spring's sweet health and happiness their mossy cups they quaff.

Do you hear the thousand voices?
There's a stir in every thing!
The rough winds have learn'd to whisper,
And the brooks have learn'd to sing.
And each leaf in its young flutter
Tries the pleasant word to utter,—
Do you hear and understand it? Little children, it is Spring!

CHAPTER XIV.

To the woods !—there was music in the very sound. Certainly these children were not learned in the glories of mosses and snail shells and ground pine ; they knew little of the rare leafy scent of the forest, of the beauties hid away in the cleft of every rock, and at the foot of every tree. They had lived always in the city ; and even the silvery tinkle with which a mountain stream finds its way over pebbles, and between rocks, and over and under the fallen tree stems, was almost unknown to them, though the booming of city clocks, and the chiming of city bells were familiar enough. But where knowledge failed, imagination came in ; and the woods might have been Aladdin's palace, for the fairy visions the name called up. They were at a good distance too, (the woods—not the visions !)—quite too far, Sam declared, for a walk, at least for people who had to bring home a load. So the old brown horse, Meteor—Jack named him, because he was so slow—and the lumber wagon came round to the door, and the children mounted to their seats in an indescribable state of glee. There were Clover, and Lily, and Primrose, all in their gardening dresses and boots, and each furnished with an old basket and her new trowel. There was Sam with his spade, and a much larger basket ; there was Jack, with only his tongue and the ordinary features of his face, with which he certainly did a

great deal of work, already established on the rough board in front, which he chose to call the box. Then there was Roger, who wanted leaf mould or something for his own gardening purposes, and in large quantities too ; so the end of the wagon was boarded off for him and his spade and his load, whatever it might prove to be, and the children all stowed themselves a little closer in front.

"What is on foot now?" said Mr May, surveying the party from his library window.

"Sand and leaf mould, sir," Sam answered.

"Meteor's on foot, sir, and I'm driving," said Jack ; and away they went, the old horse shaking his ears, as if in much doubt as to his having the best of the bargain. Such merry bursts of laughter as the wagon jolted over little rough places in the road ; it was clear that the little rough places in life were all unknown.

"But what do we want sand for?" said Lily ; "I didn't know we were going after sand."

"We are not, Roger is."

"Sam, why don't you drive?" said little Primrose.

"That horse goes too fast for me, Prim. It quite takes away my breath to drive Meteor, and I must save myself up for the leaf mould."

"But sand in the woods!" said Lily. "I thought sand grew on the sea shore."

"She thought it grew on the sea shore!" said Jack.

"Sand does not grow anywhere, Lily," said Sam. "It is *found* on the sea shore ; and it is found too on the edge of many a lake and pond far away from the sea."

"Oh, I love ponds ;" said Lily.

"And I'd liketo see a lake very much," said Primrose.

"Well, this is somethingbetween the two," said Jack, "according as you take it. It's a pond for poor people's ducks,

and a lake for rich people's swans. I say, Sam, let's leave Roger to take this old lumber concern round by the road, and we 'll follow the brook."

"And the brook will lead us into difficulty, as like as not," said Sam.

"It's a pity if we aren't a match for the brook," said Jack. "And I can tell you, we'll all be asleep in ten minutes more if we stay here. *I'm* going to follow the brook."

"Oh, we'd like to go too!" sighed all the children.

"Of course!" said Sam. "What sort of a way is it, Roger?"

"It's pretty much of a muchness," said Roger, who never threw away words upon anything. "Kind o' rocky and soppy,—that's the brook."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Jack, "who cares for either!"

"And we may have to cross the brook twenty times; and the stepping-stones may be wet and slippery, and ever so far apart."

"But that's fun," urged Lily.

"And you can always carry us over," suggested Primrose.

This last was unanswerable.

Sam laughed; and saying that he should have to follow up quite a line of business, as well as the brook, he gave Jack permission to stop as soon as they came to the bridge.

It was not much of a bridge truly, just a plank or two laid in the road, over which went the wagon wheels, and under which ran the little stream, softly singing its song of peace. On either side the wild water-plants—cowslips, and crowfoot, and the rest—were pushing up their green shoots; and a few frogs lived there, and gazed at the world.

Jack was out of the wagon before it had fairly stopped,

throwing the reins on Meteor's back as a gentle hint to look out for himself; and the others were not long in following, the three children all aglow at this vision of happiness in a new shape.

"It's perfectly delightful!" said Lily, when they had crossed the fence and began their line of march through a broad meadow, where at first the brook went quietly enough.

"No matter where it leads us," said Sam.

"No," said Lily; "I don't care in the least."

"But we're not following the brook," said Clover, "for the brook runs just the other way."

"And we are following it *this* way, up instead of down. You can follow a thing up to its source, or down to its consequences."

"Sam," said little Primrose, "what are the consequences of the brook?"

"The consequences of its running so far from home," answered Sam, laughing, "are that it tumbles into the river, and the river carries it off to the sea."

"How can the sea hold 'em all?" said Lily. "There's about fifteen hundred rivers, I should think, on the map."

"Ah," said Sam, "that is a deep question! 'All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full.' It was a wonder even to Solomon."

"But just look at that dusty old Meteor, jogging along the road," said Jack. "Neither he nor Roger can tell which of 'em is the fastest asleep. Lily, let's have a race."

Lily seldom needed to be asked twice when a race was in question; and immediately the two were skimming away over the young grass at a great rate.

"Stop at the edge of the woods!" Sam shouted to them, "we have to get our leaf mould there."

And Jack shouted "Yes!" and never paused for an instant. But Lily looked queer enough as she ran, holding her basket in one hand and her trowel in the other; speeding across the smooth ground, until she and Jack both disappeared in the edge of the woods, which crept down to meet the meadow at the further side. It was a drawn game then, but no one could tell what became of the race or of the runners after that; for when the rest of the party reached the woods, and began to follow the brook in rough earnest, Lily and Jack seemed to have followed their own counsel as well, and gone on ahead.

"They will certainly get into mischief," Sam said, with some disturbance of mind; but there was nothing to do about it. Clover and Prim could not be left, and could not hurry over the stones fast enough to give any hope of overtaking the runaways until they chose to stop. Of course there was no searching for leaf mould, that must wait till the party were all together again; and perhaps it was just as well, for empty baskets are much more manageable when one is following a brook.

And now the course of the little stream grew very rough indeed; mounting slightly up the hillside, and finding its bed among great boulders, and jagged points of rock, and mossy pebbles. Back and forth, back and forth, from one side to the other, the children had to cross; and all the while the brook went singing along its way, and kept whispering the sweetest things. Sometimes when Sam had taken his place on a mossy stone in the midst of the stream, and had swung the two children lightly over, he would stand quite still for a moment, listening.

"What *are* you listening to, Sam?" Clover said at last. And Sam laughed, and answered,—

"The brook ; hear how it kisses the pebbles."

"Kisses the pebbles !" Prim repeated ; and then Sam sprung over to the dry land, and caught Prim up and kissed her, and then they went on again. And in some places he had to carry them quite across in his arms. But oh, how beautiful it was ! The bright water, and the mossy rocks, and the tufts of fern that waved their green plumes in every crevice and corner. The tree buds were swelling, and some had even hung out their early flowers ; while under foot were a hundred plants of different shape and tint, and tufts of white saxifrage, and purple buds of hepatica, gleamed out upon the rocks or from a blanket of brown leaves.

"This is the very place to get our leaf mould," Sam remarked, "here in these nooks and corners ; but it will not do to stop. We must hurry on to find Lily and Jack."

"I think Lily and Jack might have waited, that's what think," said Prim ; but they hurried on and came soon to the edge of the woods on the other side. Here was a scene !

Before them lay a silent little lake, shimmering in the spring sun, and with a border of smooth hard sand, and a thick background of forest. Close at hand, where the waters ran out from the lake, there was a complete thicket of shrubs and plants that like the wet. Tall willow bushes with their soft yellow catkins, and green tufts of cowslip leaves, and yellow sprays of spice bush ; and even the *Symplocarpus foetidus* looked handsome with its spreading leaves and strange flowers.

At the edge of the woods, about half-way down the lake, was a small red house ; a faint, dreamy line of smoke just telling of a small spring fire, and somebody at home ; and towards this house, skimming away across the sand, went



"And in some places he had to carry them quick across in his arms."—
P. 102.



Lily and Jack, Lily's hands full of strange plants, and Jack holding her elbow fast, but whether to help or hinder her did not quite appear.

"Jack!—stop!—here!" called Sam. But Jack made not the least stop. Half turning his head, he shouted back the one word, "Soppy!" and hurried on as before.

"He has had that child in the mud, not a doubt of it," said Sam. "Yes, Prim, I'll get you the flowers before we go, but I must see what Jack is at first. You and Clover follow me slowly along the sand, and don't go an inch nearer the lake than you are now."

With which words Sam left them, striding away across the little beach at a rate which soon brought him to the red house, though not before Lily and Jack had opened the door and rushed in, quite regardless of the small ceremony of knocking or asking leave.

CHAPTER XV.

MUD!—that one thing at least was certain. Step, step upon the clean threshold; and step, step along the neat strip of rag carpet that covered the passage; and step, step into the shining little room that lay at the further end! For seeing an open door in this direction, Jack and Lily had hurried towards it, and presented themselves quite unannounced. And the room was shining. From the white scrubbed floor to the gray stone hearth; from the well-brushed tea kettle that hung upon the crane, to the tortoise-shell cat that lay before the fire, with the sun glinting upon her spotted fur. Yes, and to the cat's mistress, in her clean gown of blue calico, well sprinkled with white spots, who sat in the chimney corner spinning flax upon a small wheel. The clock face was new washed, the brass candlesticks shone like gold; the wooden table was scoured white, like the floor. Everything was in afternoon full dress of neatness and leisure.

Into this shining domain came the two intruders with their muddy boots, from which a little gush of wet blackness oozed out at every step; and it was hard to tell who was most taken aback,—the cat, the mistress, or Lily herself, who suddenly came to a dark pause in the middle of the white floor.

"Lily! Lily!" said Sam's voice from the passage, "that is too bad!"

"Not a bit of it—if you mean my floor," said the mistress

of the house, putting aside her wheel. "I always do count to have it mudded, the worst kind, after I've mopped up. But where in the name of sense has the child been? Gaess you went pokin' round after cowslips likely. And if she haint got both hands full of skunk cabbage! Better leave *that* outdoors, dear—it's a sight worse than the mud."

Lily looked hopelessly at her foul, handsome flowers, which were already spreading their sickly odour through the room; but move she hardly could. Once let those mud-clogged boots stand still for a minute, and they took fast hold.

"Can't stir—as you live!" said the woman with a queer smile. "Here—you'll just have to jump out of your boots and let 'em stand. Phew! Now would you think a plant could smell so like the real thing?"

Sam made a quick imperative sign to Jack to take the flowers away, and then to come back and unlace Lily's boots; for it soon appeared that Jack himself was only mud-splashed and splattered. And then when the boots were unlaced, Sam lifted Lily quite out of them—out of the stockings too, which were almost of the colour of the boots; and cold and trembling and ashamed, Lily found herself put down in front of the fire, by the side of the clean tortoise-shell cat. The cat looked doubtful; but her mistress was full of kind pity.

"Poor little dear!" she said; "now don't speak a word to her. *She* don't like the mud any better than you do. Though what on earth she went in so deep for! all along of her tall boots, I guess. If they'd been up to her knees, she *would* have been a sight. Where's t' other one?"

Jack had withdrawn quite into the background with Lily's boots, neither venturing to go away nor to come further in.

"Put them boots down outside the back door, and come along to the fire," said Mrs de Peyster. "No use standing there, child; the floor can't look no worse than it does. There, sit down and get warm."

And Jack sat down in the corner, and stuck out his toes to the fire, looking more subdued than most people had ever seen him.

It was at this moment that Clover and Primrose reached the door of the house; and seeing Sam's figure in the distance within, and being too anxious to wait any longer for tidings, they even came in too, stepping softly along the passage to the door of the little room. Such bright little figures, in their neat garden dresses, and black boots and white stockings; and not the least speck of mud to be seen anywhere.

"Well, now, ain't it strange, the difference there is in children!" said Mrs de Peyster, surveying the new comers. "Not a spot, not a splash, and come the same road too, I'll be bound. Yes, pretty ones, walk in and see the cat."

"What is the matter, Sam?" said Clover, trembling; for anything more dismal than Lily and Jack, in their subdued state by the fire, could not well be conceived.

"There's a good deal of mud the matter," said Sam, looking at the floor. "Nothing worse than that!"

"Don't you worry about it," said their hostess good-naturedly; "you haven't got to clean up. Just let these two pinks come to the fire, and don't say a word to vex 'em. Here, Mouser, get up and make room."

"Oh, please don't disturb the cat!" said Prim, crouching down by the old tortoise-shell. "Is her name Mouser? Oh, what a beauty!"

"Ain't she, though!" said Mrs de Peyster. "We're not so rich as we might be, I and my husband, but we've got

two things you can't find the like of for twenty miles, if you can anywhere, and one of 'em 's the cat."

"What's the other?" said Primrose, looking up, while Mouser purred a loud accompaniment.

Mrs de Peyster laughed, and laying her finger on her lips, she took Prim's hand and led her away on tiptoe; but Clover bent over Lily.

"What is the matter, Lily? How did it happen?" she said. Lily looked at the fire, and at Clover's clean boots, and her own bare feet, and then she gave way; the tender words of sympathy were more than she could bear. She wrapped her arms around Clover's waist, and laid her face against her, and cried to her heart's content; the poor little feet that were stretched out to the fire wriggling and twisting about as if they still felt the slimy clasp of the mud. The tears were not yet dried when Mrs de Peyster came back.

"Now hush up," she said cheerily, "anybody might get mired, child, if they didn't look out. You'll be all right when you've had a piece of gingerbread. Never knew a child get in the mud yet, that didn't come out of it as hungry as two. There, eat as much as you can, 't wont hurt you. It's as plain as my father's old cow."

But the gingerbread was so good notwithstanding, that even Sam was induced to take a piece; and everybody brightened up wonderfully; while Prim whispered to her sisters,—

"Oh, what do you think I've seen? What do you think the other thing was? The loveliest little baby you *ever* saw! and it is fast asleep."

Meantime, Mrs de Peyster had slipped out again, with a pitcher of hot water, and Lily's stockings; and before any-

body guessed what she was about, the stockings were nicely washed out and hung by the fire to dry. And Lily was for once too grateful to speak.

The day was wearing on now, and Sam said, they must go after the leaf mould at once, or they would be too late reaching home. But as Lily had neither dry boots nor stockings, of course she must wait quietly by the fire. Roger had come round with his wagon, and was busy now getting the load of sand; and the rest of the party took up their baskets once more, and went off to the woods for mould, leaving Lily behind.

"Let us see what it looks like when you've got it," said Mrs de Peyster; "for going to the woods for earth is about the last thing."

It looked like *very* black stuff, the children thought. Sam went about from one hollow among the rocks to another, clearing away the loose leaves that lay on the top, and then filling his basket with the black mould. Black and soft and wet. But it was easy to dig; and the little baskets as well as the big ones were soon full,—even Lily's basket, which Jack had brought in her place.

"I don't see how you know where to find it, Sam," said little Primrose, as her brother moved from place to place, instead of digging straight on.

"Where the ground is pretty smooth and even, the leaves blow off," replied Sam; "but the wind sweeps them up into these corners and hollows, and there they lie and decay, until the bed of leaves becomes a deep bed of leaf mould,—just the best thing in the world for plants."

Lily, meanwhile, had been by no means disconsolate nor unhappy; though she saw the woods party set out with a very sad face indeed. But Mrs de Peyster took her to

see the baby, too ; and then the baby woke up, and was brought out into the kitchen ; and Lily was so charmed that she never noticed how the time went, and was almost sorry to hear the others come back.

“ Well, I only hope if your flowers *do* grow in that stuff,” said Mrs de Peyster, peering into the baskets, “ that you’ll let me see some of ’em. I’d like to know if they grow any different from flowers that don’t make quite such a fuss.”

Of course the children promised her a bunch of the prettiest things that should be in their gardens ; and then they all got into the wagon, and Meteor was once more put to his speed. And the children reached home as tired and happy and hungry (despite the gingerbread) as only children can be.

Then Sam shewed them how to sift their leaf mould through a great wire sieve, called a riddle ; so that no stones or sticks or whole leaves might trouble the little roots of the young plants. And then the sifted mould was thoroughly mixed with the earth and some of Roger’s sand ; and Sam pronounced things all ready for sowing day—when-ever that should come.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was the prettiest work possible to sow those seeds. First of all, Sam went over the lists carefully, studying Mr Vick's Catalogue, and laying aside all those seeds which were perfectly hardy, and therefore might be sowed in the open ground. A few of the half-hardy kinds must also wait, because they would not bear transplanting ; while two or three hardy ones must be sowed in pots, because, unless transplanted, they would not come to their full double perfection.

The next thing was to choose out flower pots—to find how many would grow in each little green-house box—or rather, how many *must* go, to hold the different kinds of seeds, and then to pick them out of such a size as the box would hold. Then in the bottom of each, over the little round hole, Sam laid a bit of a broken flower pot, and over that several more bits. That was for "drainage," he told the children ; the first bit to keep the earth from running all away through the hole, and the rest to prevent its ever getting sodden and clogged beneath the plants. Then the pots must all be filled with the prepared earth—not quite full, but within an inch or so of the top ; and here the new trowels came in play. It was charming work to take up a trowelful of the earth and pour it carefully into a flower pot ! and Sam showed the children how to shake it down, and pick off all the lumps from the surface, so as to leave a smooth, soft, even place for the

seeds. But to put them in, and cover them, and press down the earth again, was really a work of art. For the seeds were of such different sizes! Here were Clover's hyacinth beans, large, stout things, that looked quite able to take care of themselves; and here was the petunia seed, so small and fine that it seemed as if a puff of wind might blow it all away. Lily's canna seeds, too, must be soaked in hot water; and everything must have a label; so altogether it was quite a complicated affair.

"Mr Vick says," remarked Sam, "that about as good a rule as can be given for planting seeds is to cover them twice the depth of their own diameter."

"But what's their diameter?" said Prim.

"The distance straight through the seed, from one side to the other."

"Dear me! but we can't measure," said Lily.

"No, you must look well at the seed and guess—measure by eye."

"I could measure these," said Clover, handling her hyacinth'beans; "but some of the seeds are so *very* little, Sam!"

"Well, those smallest of all you don't cover at all," said her brother; "or at least only in this way: See, you make the earth just as smooth and soft and even as you can all over the top, and then you sprinkle the seeds very thinly on it—so."

"Why don't you sprinkle them thick?" said Lily.

"Because if the plants come up too thick they will be crowded and weak," said Sam; "and then you would have to thin them out, and so throw away a great many plants. And that is troublesome and disagreeable. There, Lily, scatter just a few of your petunia seeds on the earth

Now if they were larger, we would scatter or sift some earth over them ; but as they are so very small you can take your hand, or the bottom of this other flower pot, and press the earth and seeds gently down together. There,—that will cover them sufficiently.”

“Where shall I stick my label?—in the middle?” said Lily.

“Why no! you would poke down ever so many seeds with it. Stick it in close at the edge of the pot, and next time put it in before you sow the seeds. But stay, have you written on it?”

“Yes. O I guess it will do,” said Lily, yielding the label with an unwilling hand. Sam looked at it and shook his head. Lily had written first a very large P, which took up so much of the little slip of wood that the following letters were quite matter of conjecture, and indeed she could get no further than the second syllable.

“How are you going to know that from pinks?” said Sam, whittling the letters off with his knife. “Don’t try to write too much on a little label like this. If I were you I would put only numbers—write No. 1 on this label, and then No. 1 on this bag of petunia seed.”

“What an excellent plan!” said Clover. “But wouldn’t ink be better?”

“Ink would run on this soft wood. No, the pencil marks will last long enough, if they’re made on a smooth surface ; but if you wanted them *never* to wear out, then the way is to brush over the label with a little white lead, such as painters use, and write on it while it is wet with this same pencil ; and then you would have an indelible label.”

So the planting went on with great zeal and success ; and the little paper bags grew empty, and the green-house boxes

grew full of pots ; and the children were brimming with a delight that could hardly even talk in its rapt excitement.

"Why should I sow only part of my pinks here?" inquired Lily, in answer to some counsel of Sam's.

"Because, if these should not do well, you would have some seed left to try again," replied Sam.

"Then I'd better save some of all the kinds," said Lily. "What a pity! I've put every one of my canna seeds in the hot water! Will it do to take some of them out?"

"Not after they have once been in," said Sam. "But cannas are worth nothing—will make no show—unless they are planted early, so it was best to sow them all at once."

"How many things there are to think of in gardening!" said Clover, covering her zinnia seeds with a light hand. "Sam, I'm afraid our boxes won't be very warm out *here*."

"No, indeed. Perhaps mamma will admit them to the bow-window."

"I'll run in this minute and ask her!" cried Prim. Which she did ; and of course mamma said yes.

So when all the seeds were planted—all that were to be planted then—Sam carried the boxes into the house and set them on a kitchen table that was already placed in the bow-window. And very pretty they looked, with the little red pots full of brown earth, and the neat labels, and the clean bright panes of glass sloping down over all. The sun darted in to look at them, and the three children stood bending over them in a half bewitched state.

"Must we keep these panes of glass tight shut all the time?" said Clover.

"Yes, in cool weather. Sometimes at mid-day, if it gets very warm, you can raise one of them a little, or slip it aside, just to let in air."

Lily lifted one of the panes and thrust in her finger.

"Oh, Sam, it's real warm in there now," she said.

"So it ought to be. It will hardly be too warm before the seeds come up."

"Will they come up to-morrow, Sam?" said little Primrose."

"To-morrow! Have you any idea of the work that must be done down in that brown earth before your seeds come up?"

"Oh, Sam, that is just what I want to know," cried Clover. "I think there never was anything quite so beautiful as our boxes and seeds. I'd like to study them all day."

"Well, you can study them from a new point of view now," said Sam, laughing, "for there comes Maria Jarvis. She'll give you lessons!" And Sam marched off out of the room, while Lily rushed to the door to welcome her friend, and Clover and Primrose followed more slowly. If the truth must be told, they would rather have watched their boxes just then.

"How do you do?" said Maria Jarvis, making great efforts to arrange her short hoop to her satisfaction. "Mamma had business to do in the village, and so I thought I would drive on and see your place. I suppose you haven't done much to it yet."

"Sam has dug up part of my garden," said Lily, innocently.

"Oh, is Sam your gardener?" said Maria. "Our gardener is named William. He's the head gardener, you know; and then there's Patrick and Michael besides. William's the best gardener in the country, I suppose. A great many people call him Mr Stubbs."

"Lily was talking of *our* gardens, not of papa's," said Clover; for Lily was quite breathless, and had no words ready. "And in *our* gardens my brother Sam is head gardener, and we're to be Patrick and Michael ourselves. Don't you have a garden all for yourself too?"

"Oh yes; but William takes care of it," said Maria. "I couldn't, you know, it's such dirty work. My! I don't know how many frocks I should want if I did anything but walk in the garden. I've just had ten new ones made for the summer, and mamma said it was such a plague to arrange to have 'em all different, the trimmings and all—I guess she wouldn't want to get any more. But Miss Simmons, (that's our dressmaker in town,) she's really a very clever young person, mamma says; and when mamma was quite worn out with the trimmings, and didn't know what to do with my pink foulard, Miss Simmons went about and about all over town till she found some rose-bugs. Just the thing for a pink dress, you know; and she put rose-bugs here—and here—and here—all over it. Mamma was delighted. I'll show it to you the next time you come. What's your best dress?"

"White muslin," said Clover.

"White muslin's very nice if it's trimmed all round the bottom with coloured ribbon, said Maria. "I've got two made so, a pink and a green; and I've got another embroidered all over with blue spots."

"What flowers are you going to have in your garden, Maria?" said Clover, trying to get upon some subject where Lily and she would feel at home.

"Oh, I don't know; just what William puts there," said Maria. "He always has something new every spring, papa says."

"I shall have pinks in mine," said Lily.

"Pinks are very old-fashioned," answered Maria. "So William says. I suppose you'll have fuchsias, of course."

"No, I guess not," said Clover; "*we* shall not. I don't know what papa may do."

"Oh yes, you must have fuchsias," said Maria. "And then in the greenhouse you must have gloxinias and air-plants—things that won't grow in every village window, as papa says."

"But we haven't any greenhouse," said Clover.

"Oh, but of course you'll build one," said Maria. "Sarah had the most beautiful present the other day!—from the gentleman she's engaged to, the same one that gave her the bracelet. It's a butterfly for her hair."

"I shouldn't like a butterfly on *my* hair," said Primrose, decidedly.

"Not a real one, you little goose," said Maria. "It's all gold and enamel, and ruby eyes, and diamond spots. And it clasps into her hair, so—just like a brooch. It's the sweetest thing! So suitable for summer, mamma said."

"Well, won't you come and see what we have for a greenhouse?" said Clover, leading the way to the bow-window. "Sam made us these boxes himself, and we've just been planting our seeds. And mamma is going to tell us how they grow."

"How they grow?" said Maria. "Well, you are the strangest girl! It must be a great deal of trouble to take care of such little boxes, I should think. And papa says a few flowers aren't worth much. Quantity, quantity—and what other people don't have—that's what papa likes. But

I hope you'll enjoy them, I'm sure. Good-bye, I've had a delightful time, and I'll show you all my flowers when you come, and Sarah's butterfly. Good-bye!"

And away whirled the carriage, after which Clover and Lily stood gazing with bewildered eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUT the minute the carriage was fairly out of sight and the last roll of the wheels had died away in the distance, Clover caught Lily round the waist and went dancing with her all through the hall, and into the sitting-room, and around that. And Lily could neither stop nor object at first; for Clover was a sturdy little piece, with strong arms, and Lily herself was quite out of breath with astonishment and exercise.

"What are you about?" she cried at last. "Do let me alone! What can you be thinking of, Clover? Let me go! I want to read."

Clover let her go and danced on by herself.

"I—want to think," she said, demurely, and panting a little too. "I want to get—my ideas in order. Just now—I don't know whether—rose-bugs are white muslins, or—pink foulards are flower pots." And Clover went off with another whirl and a full burst of Yankee Doodle, much to Lily's indignation.

"How you do act!" she said. "White muslins aren't pink foulards—if that's what you want to know. Can't you be quiet, Clover? You do make such a noise!"

Clover stopped instantly.

"What do you want to do, Lily? Shall we go and look at our seeds again?"

"No," said Lily, shortly. "I want to read. You can't see the seeds if you look." And Lily turned her back upon the

bow-window, boxes, flower pots, and all, and sat down in a corner of the sofa with her book.

Softly, and without even speaking to make a noise, Clover took little Prim's hand in hers and went towards the window; for even the outside of those panes of glass in her little box had a great charm for Clover.

"Will there really be so *very* few flowers?" said Primrose, looking anxiously up in her face.

"No indeed," said Clover. "I don't think so at all. I'm only afraid I shan't have room for them all. Why, Prim, I counted the seeds that I sowed in just one of my pots, and there were ten; and Mr Vick says that kind must be set a foot apart when it's transplanted; so that one little plot will want ten feet of my garden. I don't know what I'm to do, for I can't throw one of 'em away," said Clover, bending lovingly over the little box. "Oh! I wish I knew what my seeds are doing down in the earth!"

"They are growing larger every minute," said Mrs May, for she had come in while the children talked. "That is the first thing a seed does after it is covered up in the earth and begins to get warm and moist. By and by you will see this smooth earth in your pots cracking open here and there, and all pushed up in little heaps, because the hidden seeds are swelling and taking more room."

"Will it? will they?" said Clover, the pink tinge flushing over her cheeks. "Oh Lily, do you hear?"

"Yes—no, I am reading," said Lily.

"But mamma, what makes them swell?" said Clover. "I mean, why do they? what is it for?"

"Do you remember when Prim was a baby, covered up in her cradle and fast asleep, how still she lay, and how smooth and undisturbed was her little silk quilt?"

"Yes, indeed," said Clover. "I used to watch and listen sometimes to see if she was really breathing."

"Well, these seeds that you have just covered with soft earth are asleep. Hid away in each one of them is a tiny morsel of a plant, all crumpled up and folded in, as still and motionless as if it had no life. Even in a large seed like a bean it is very small, just a little stem and one or two leaves; and there it lies, fast bound in the hard outer shell of the seed, waiting its time."

"Mamma, can you *see* this little plant?" said Clover.

"Yes, sometimes. If you split open a bean very carefully, you will see the tiny plant folded away between the two halves of the bean; but in very small seeds you would need a magnifying glass, or even a microscope. Well, when the seed is put in the ground, the hard outer shell grows moist, from the moist earth, and begins to crack open; and the warm rays of the sun send their heat quite down through earth and seed and all, to the little plant that lies so fast asleep. And the plant awakes, and begins to stir and stretch itself out—or to grow, as we say. The wee bit of a stem lengthens, and pushes its way through the outer wall of seed down into the earth, and the leaves shoot up into the sunshine and unfold, shaking off by degrees the seed husk which held them prisoner."

"Mamma, it's like a fairy tale!" said Clover.

"Yes, it's the princess in the wood!" cried Primrose. "She's asleep, and the sun is the prince that comes and kisses her till she wakes up."

"Something like that," said Mrs May, smiling. "But oh, how many princesses there are in every wood, in every foot of ground, on the rocks, and even in the streams! This is part of that wonderful work of the world which is going on



"I used to watch and listen sometimes to see if she was really breathing."—P. 120.



all the time—part of what the sun was meant to do when God made two great lights and set them in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth. And now the little stem which shot forth down into the ground begins to branch a little, throwing out tiny fibres, and becomes the root ; taking in from the dark soil a part of the food on which the young plant lives, while at the same time the leaves expand at the upper end of the stem, and other leaves come out, and they take in the rest of its food from air and sunshine and drops of dew. So every plant begins its growth—the smallest flower and the tallest tree.”

“It is almost too wonderful!” said Clover, drawing a long breath. “I shall have to think about it a great deal.”

“Mamma,” said Primrose, “the princess slept a hundred years ; would the seed sleep so long and then wake up after all ?”

“Not every kind of seed ; they are as different as possible in this respect. Some will not grow if they are more than one year old, and but few after they are five or six ; while some are good at sixty years old, and others must be sowed just as soon as they are ripe.”

“Mamma, I don’t understand yet *how* the seed does all this,” said Clover ; “how the leaves unfold and the roots stretch out.”

“I think no mortal understands it,” said her mother ; “it is one of the secrets of the Lord’s power. ‘Thou blessest the springing thereof,’ wrote King David of the earth’s rich carpet of grass and corn ; and I think the utmost learning can say no more.”

“Oh, Lily ! oh, Lily ! how much you have lost !” said Clover, looking towards the sofa, where Lily lay curled up as if half asleep. “And all for that stupid book !”

"The book's not stupid," said Lily, slowly uncurling herself and getting up. "And I'm tired hearing about seeds; it's nothing but seeds, seeds, from morning to night!" And Lily stretched her arms about as if tired of the world generally.

"Did you have a pleasant visit from Maria, Lily?" inquired her mother.

"Mamma—it wasn't very long."

"Mamma," said Primrose, "she says she's had ten new frocks made just for summer—ten all for herself, mamma!"

"Poor child!" said Mrs May.

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Lily, coming up to the window, "what makes you say that?"

"She is very young to be a prisoner," said Mrs May.

"A prisoner!" said Lily. "I don't see how having plenty of frocks could make her that, I'm sure. I should think it would be just the other way. I thought having nothing to wear kept people at home. What can you mean, mamma?"

"Not that people who are kept at home are prisoners," said Mrs May, with a smile.

"Ah! it's one of mamma's stories, I know," cried Primrose, as keen for a story as a pointer for game. "Mamma, dear, won't you *please* tell it to us right away? What is it called, mamma?"

"It might be called 'A Legend of Grundy Castle,'" said Mrs May, stroking Prim's head.

"What an odd name for a castle!" said Lily.

"Never mind," said Prim. "Do sit down and be quiet Lily. Now, mamma—I'm all ready. Come, Clover."

"Is it a fairy tale, mamma?" said Clover, bringing her

thoughts back with some reluctance from the little flower-pots that held such real wonders.

"You shall judge. Grundy Castle stood on a bit of land that was claimed by several kingdoms. In like manner many nations disputed possession of its mistress, Mrs Grundy. And in fact she was quite a citizen of the world, and had received her education (such as it was) in so many places that she was entirely at home in all. It was hard to travel in any country without meeting her, or at least without hearing what she had said the last time she came that way."

"Her own castle couldn't have been much, then," said Lily, "or she wouldn't have gone wandering round so."

"Perhaps she had your ideas about home," said Mrs May. "But however that was, she certainly did seem to prefer other people's houses to her own, and was never still a minute."

"Mamma, what sort of a person was she?" said Clover. "You said 'her education, *such as it was* !'"

"She was not what I call well-educated," said Mrs May; "for of some of the most important things she was entirely ignorant. For instance, she had never 'studied to be quiet;' she knew nothing of 'the law of kindness;' her thoughts had never been trained to think no evil, nor her hands to bear other people's burdens."

"What funny studies!" said Primrose.

"All that she had ever learned was to talk pretty well in all languages; to handle a spy-glass; enough geography to make her think she knew exactly where anybody was at a particular moment, and just so much arithmetic as to put two and two together,—though she made grievous mistakes sometimes even in doing that small sum."

"Mamma, what a strange person!" said Lily. "I can't make her out at all. Was she handsome?"

"No," said Mrs May, "she used her spy-glass too much for that. In fact, she never looked at anything straight with both eyes, and that, of course, gave a disagreeable expression to her face."

"I think she was horrid!" said Primrose. "Just like the Affrites in my 'Arabian Nights.' She never would have got into *my* house, I can tell her."

"Other people let her come," said Mrs May. "She had a great deal of power, and went everywhere. Even when they were afraid of her they let her come, for I think they were more afraid to keep her away."

"But mamma," said Lily, "I don't see how you're going to get round to where you started from. You said Maria Jarvis was a prisoner, and then you go off and tell all about Mrs Grundy, who lived a thousand years ago, or never lived at all. I don't see what she has to do with Maria's ten frocks."

"What *could* she have to do with them?" said Mrs May smiling. "But you must wait for an answer, Lily, for there comes papa, and we must have tea."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I WISH I knew who Mrs Grundy really was," said Lily, as she rubbed her face with the towel next morning.

"Yes, so do I," said Clover, brushing away at her hair. "Mamma's stories always mean something; and I'm almost sure I've heard her speak of Mrs Grundy before. I want to hear the rest—it was very interesting."

"Yes, it was interesting," said Lily, in a rather doubtful tone of voice, "but I don't know how—mamma so often says something disagreeable."

"Mamma say anything disagreeable!" exclaimed Clover, turning round with wide open eyes.

"How you take one up!" said Lily. "Of course I don't mean mamma herself, only in her stories, you know,—the stories say it, if you like that any better."

"I like mamma's stories, every one," said Clover, gravely.

"Well, so do I," said Lily, "only they make me feel queer sometimes—or I'm afraid they will, which comes to the same thing. But I'll tell you what I do wish, Cloyer—I wish I knew how many things are really worth having."

"Why, a great many things," said Clover. "There's flowers, and books, and pictures—oh, I couldn't begin to count them all."

"No, but I mean," said Lily, "how many of each kind—how much must there be to make it really worth while? You know Maria Jarvis said that so few flowers weren't

good for much, or something like that. Now how many *are* good for much?"

"I don't believe *she* knows," said Clover, with a slightly disdainful air.

"Well, but she said her father always wanted a quantity—don't you remember?"

"I remember," said Clover. "And I guess it wouldn't be much matter if I forgot."

"You always laugh at everything Maria says," said Lily, rather displeased at the implied slight to her friend's conversation.

"Oh no, not at everything; only at some things," said Clover. "But if you want to know how many flowers are worth having, Lily, why don't you ask papa?"

"I guess I will," said Lily. "Wouldn't he laugh!"

"Then wait and listen," said Clover. "I do that sometimes, and often it almost seems as if papa and mamma understood, and began to talk of that very thing on purpose. Wait and listen, if you don't know. I know," said Clover, with a happy face, "I want every flower I can get, whether it's one or a hundred. Oh, I wonder how our boxes look this morning."

The boxes looked queer—so the children thought; or rather it was the panes of glass. Last night they had been perfectly bright and clear, and now each one was covered with fine drops of water, like a thick steam, so that you could hardly see the little flower pots within.

"It's that tiresome Malvina," said Lily. "She's for ever washing the windows, and she hadn't eyes to see that our glasses were all clean, and so she's been washing them. We must get mamma to speak to her right away. I won't have her meddling with *my* box of plants—ignorant thing!"

"Who is an ignorant thing?" inquired Sam, from the fireside."

"Malvina."

"What has Malvina been doing?"

"Why, she has washed all our panes of glass," said Lily; "here they are dripping with water."

"Ah!" said Sam.

"Yes, ah!" said Lily. "And what's more, she must have taken 'em every one off, for the water's all on the inside. I guess she wiped off the top."

"Indeed!" said Sam, with the same provoking coolness. "Ah!"

Lily bounded from the window and caught hold of his book.

"Sam, you shan't sit there and exasperate me. Just come and look for yourself, if you don't choose to believe other people. The panes of glass are just *dripping*."

"So they are—I see," said Sam, coming to the window. "Ignorance is a wonderful thing!"

"It's a very troublesome thing," said Lily.

"Very!" said Sam.

"Lily," said Clover, who had been studying her brother's face, "Sam is just laughing at us. He means that *we* are the ignorant people."

"He don't!" said Lily. "Now, Sam?"

"There are ignorant people somewhere," said Sam, with a grave shake of his head.

"Well, I don't want to be one any longer," said Clover.

"Oh, maybe he washed them himself!" cried little Primrose.

"Truly I did not," said Sam; "but I'll tell you what did—the air inside the boxes."

"The air!" said Lily. "Sam, you're a real humbug. The air is just as dry as a chip."

"The air," continued Sam, without heeding this polite comment, "by means of the heat which is in it, holds fast and hid away a certain amount of moisture; but whenever it meets with something much colder than itself, then it gives up part of its heat and moisture too. Now the air inside your boxes is warmer than the glass, and so the glass steals away some of its heat. If a piece of cloth were there instead, it would take up heat and moisture together; but the glass can take up only the heat. Now, then, when the warm damp air in the box comes against the cold panes of glass, some of the heat in the air passes into the glass; but the moisture which that heat held fast in the air is left behind on the surface of the glass—deposited there—it cannot go in."

"Well, that's curious," said Lily. "But I wish it wouldn't get deposited there—as you call it; it'll go drop, dropping all over my poor seeds."

"Not much; it may run down the glass a little to the edge of the box. But that is one use of the glass, Lily; it keeps all the moisture in."

"Where does the moisture come from—to begin with?" said Clover.

"Why, from the earth in the pots; and if there were no glass there the earth would be all dry in a very short time."

"Then we could water it," said Lily.

"It is a difficult matter to water the earth over small seeds without washing them out of place. By and by, when the plants come up, they may need a little water now and then, but even that must be done very carefully. I'll shew you how when the time comes."

"Well," said Prim, "I guess Maria Jarvis would think a few flowers were something to take care of, any how. But she says all *her* father cares about is quantity—quantity!"

"I daresay. Well, he has a quantity of—almost everything," said Sam, pausing a little to consider his words.

"Of course, our boxes and things looked very mean to her," said Lily.

"Mean, did they?" said Sam. "She is a wise young lady. How should you like to know somebody who never had but one thing at a time in her life, and hardly ever even heard of a quantity?"

"One flower, do you mean?" said Clover.

"One anything. She would think your boxes a whole green-house."

"Would she?" said Lily, her spirits rising at the idea of such a different view of things. "I think I should like to see her very much."

"Well, some time you shall," said Sam; "but just now it is needful to go to breakfast."

It seemed as if Clover's words were to come true that morning, for Mr May came in to breakfast bringing a single half-blown La Marque rose in his hand.

"There," he said to his wife; "so much I got for you in my early ride, and only so much."

"Only!" said Mrs May, as she took the exquisite flower and gazed at it.

"Ay, 'only'; I thought it was not much—compared with the store from which it came. But 'a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked'; so you can comfort yourself with that. We'll have La Marques of our own, I hope, another year."

"Papa," said Lily, "how much is a little?"

"A sapient question!" said her father, laughing. "A little is—not a great deal!"

"But you said it was *better* than a great deal, papa."

"Ah, but you must mark my conditions. A little may be wrapped up in something very sweet, and a great deal in something very bitter. Ask mamma—she knows all about it."

"But how much is worth having papa?" persisted Lily.

"As much as you can get, *I* think," said Mr May; "your mother thinks differently."

"No, I think just that," said Mrs May, "only with the conditions you are so fond of. So much as is received in the love of God, and used in the fear of God—all that is precious and worth having."

"Mamma, that don't mean our flowers?" said Primrose. "Lily was thinking of flowers."

"It means everything, of every sort."

"Flowers!" said Mr May. "And so Lily's ideas are enlarging? I thought so. She wants more ground to dig. She's such an enterprising child, this Lily, and digs so fast!"

Lily blushed and asked no more questions, but Prim took up the word in her grave way.

"Mamma, I don't know how to do it."

"What, love?"

"What you said—with my flowers," said Prim, folding her childish hands, and looking deep into the question. "I don't know how to take 'em or use 'em." The mother looked at her.

"Take them, as formed by the Lord's power and wisdom

and love, for his glory and our joy," she said. "Then use them, as given by his kindness to his little child for her pleasure and for his service."

"*Use* them—my flowers?" said Prim.

"Yes," said her mother, "all for God, since all is from him. One day he will ask even what we have done with our flowers."

CHAPTER XIX.

AND so the beautiful work went on. Oh, what an amount of care was bestowed upon the three boxes!—how they were set in the sunshine, and then moved away if the sunshine seemed to be *too* hot! and the panes of glass were raised a little to let in air in the middle of the day, and closed again before night, so as to keep in the warmth till morning. And it was no trifle, as Lily remarked, “to lug the boxes about;” and it needed judgment to tell just when they should be aired; and then there were cloudy days, and cold days, and warm days, and all sorts of days to puzzle the children, and keep their thoughts at work. Sometimes when it rained and was very cloudy and cold, you might see the three boxes paraded in front of the fire to get dry and warm; and then, with a sudden fear of some dangerous degree of heat, back they went to the window again; so that, as Prim said, there was more gardening to do in bad weather than in fine. But the fair days brought plenty of work too; and by degrees Sam dug up all the three little gardens, and got them in beautiful condition; only as the ground thus newly turned up was very damp and cold, he advised the children to wait a little before they sowed any seeds in it, and let the sun try his warming power for a few days first.

“If the ground is too cold when the seeds are put in,” said Sam, “they will as like as not mould and come to nothing; and then you will wait and wait, and have no plants after

all. But if you wait while the seeds are safe in your pocket, then there'll be something to reward your patience."

"Well, I should think these seeds in the boxes must be dry enough," said Lily. "I expect *they* will die *that* way."

"Let me see," said Sam, taking off the glasses. "They're doing well enough, but they may have just a little water. Run up to my room, Prim, and fetch me that brush that lies on my table; and you, Lily, get me a cup of water."

"A cup of water!" said Lily. "How many flower pots will that do any good to, I wonder?" But she brought it, and Sam went to work: the brush was a small painter's brush, quite new and clean.

"Is this cold water?" said Sam.

"Yes, it is," said Lily. "I suppose you don't want hot to scald 'em?"

"No, nor ice-cold to freeze them," said Sam. "I want it just about as warm as the air inside the boxes."

A little hot water from the kitchen made this all right, and then Sam dipped the brush into the cup, and drawing it skilfully through his hand, he sent down the warm drops upon the flower pots in a shower almost as fine as dew.

"Oh how beautiful!" cried Clover. "I wonder if I could do that?"

"It's finer than the rose of my watering-pot," said Primrose.

"Yes; no watering pot is fine enough for this work. You see if the drops are too large they will just displace the little seeds; and if the young plants were up they would be beaten down and half drowned."

"But you give them so very little!" said Lily, as he brother closed the panes of the first box.

"A little at a time. Seeds mould very easily, and young

plants 'damp off,' as the gardeners say—die of the wet, if they have too much of it."

"I wonder when there will be any young plants there!" said Lily. "It takes 'em a great while to grow."

"Yes, and I get so impatient watching 'em," said Primrose. "Oh, I wish mamma was here to tell us the rest of her story! that would divert my mind a little."

"Come here, poor little mind that wants diversion," said Mrs May from her work-table, with a laugh. "You want me so much, Prim, that you cannot see me when I come."

"Ah, but I can see you now," said Primrose, running to the table; "and I was looking at my boxes, you know. Now for Mrs Grundy, mamma!"

Sam went off, muttering that Mrs Grundy was no friend of his; and the rest gathered round Mrs May, and she began:--

"I said Mrs Grundy had a great deal of power, but it all lay in doing mischief and in making slaves. That is the proper word, rather than prisoners—she took people captive, and then setting a mark upon them, she left them free—to do her pleasure. Whatever she said, they must believe; whatever she ordered, they must do."

"What sort of mark did she give 'em?" asked Primrose.

"A shackle upon all their life; a bit of a chain to carry, that bound even their thoughts and opinions. And then to amuse herself, she would issue the most ridiculous orders, sending them here and there by her waiting-maid, Miss La Mode, or her secretary, R. I. De Cule. But whatever she ordered it was all the same to her captives—they never thought of resistance, but went where she bade them, and said what she said; and wore carrots or beetles on their heads, just according to her fancy."

"Beetles! why that's like Maria Jarvis's rose-bugs!" cried Primrose.

"How absurd you are, Prim!" said Lily. "Maria's rose-bugs were on her frock, child."

"Well, Sarah's butterfly wasn't," persisted Prim. "Mamma, did she ever get hold of anybody but grown-up people—any children?"

"Sometimes, when their mothers were not careful," said Mrs May, "and then it would have made your heart ache to see the poor little things. I'll tell you of one who was called Ruth Rural. Ruth had always lived a very happy life with her mother in the country, running about the fields in a white sun-bonnet, and having a pink one for Sundays; picking blackberries, and hunting for hens' nests in the long grass of the meadow or the dry hay in the barn; studying with all her might in the morning, and playing just as hard in the afternoon; until one unhappy summer, when Mrs Rural (venturing too near the grounds of Grundy Castle) was taken captive, and was then at once so bewildered that little Ruth fell an easy prey."

"But didn't she run?" cried Primrose. "I should, I know that. Mrs Grundy would never have got hold of me."

"She might," said Mrs May. "You would not be afraid of any place where you saw me, Prim, and Ruth just stayed by her mother. And what a life Mrs Grundy led the poor child! Ruth had gone away from home in a nice print dress and strong black shoes; able to run, and jump, and dance, and climb fences; and she came back in a large hoop, and a flounced robe, and silk boots. Her hair was crinkled, and braided, and bewitched till it stood on end, as if she had been hearing the worst sort of a ghost story; and (no small misfortune) Ruth had learned that she had a com-

plexion to make or to mar ; and for that Mrs Grundy had prescribed as little fresh air as possible, taken through a blue gauze veil.

"Well, when at last the poor child got home, and Grundy Castle was left far behind, the first night she was too tired to look at any thing. But next day, as soon as all the various duties enjoined by Mrs Grundy were disposed of, Ruth thought she would run out and look at her flowers. So she caught up her watering-pot and ran to the pump ; but her hoop was so large she couldn't get near it, and she had to go to the kitchen for water."

"Mamma, I wish you'd just tell us how she was dressed?" said Clover, laughing.

"As near as I remember," said Mrs May, "her dress was one which Miss La Mode had called 'extremely pretty, and even with pretensions to elegance.' It was a light blue summer poplin, with a white chip hat and a blue wreath, and high light kid boots. Well, Ruth went to her garden, and the delicate kid boots plunged down into the soft earth and came up quite another colour. Then a sweet-brier seized hold of the chip hat with its sharp fingers, tearing away the blue forget-me-nots, and leaving a rent by which it was pretty sure to be remembered for some time to come ; and the wind rushed about through the frizzed hair till Ruth looked like a wild thing. Ruth was in despair. All her flowers, she thought, looked strange at her ; and how could they help it ? with her hat swung up in the sweet-brier bush, and her blue veil all tangled in the moss rose. She walked off, quite forgetting her complexion, to another part of the garden ; and there was her own white rose bush, all shining in the sun, bending hither and thither with easy grace, sweeter than all the made-up perfumes in the world

Ruth stood there for a minute, feeling very envious ; but suddenly she thought she heard Mrs Grundy's voice coming along the road ; and Ruth dropped her watering-pot and fled into the house."

"Is that all, mamma?" asked Primrose.

"No. I am sorry to say that is only part."

"Please don't tell any more now, mamma," said Lily. "I don't think I like your stories."

"I do," said Prim ; "they're splendid. Only I don't quite understand 'em sometimes. O Jack !—you mustn't touch my box."

"Mustn't touch it, hey?" said Jack, leisurely lifting the panes of glass and peeping in, while the alarmed little owners came rushing to the bow-window. "What's the matter ! Are you afraid something will grow if I look in?"

"No, we're not, you profane boy," said Lily. "They'll grow fast enough if you'll keep your fingers off."

"Fast enough!" said Jack, whistling. "Fast enough ! Much you know about growing, or seeds either. Ah ! I could tell you how seeds *can* grow when they set about it."

"Well, tell away," said Lily.

"There was a farmer once," said Jack, taking an easy attitude upon the window-seat, "who had a lot of cucumber seed to plant."

"How much is a lot," asked Prim.

"I don't know—half a handful. Well, he put the seed in his pocket, and started for the garden ; and before he got there, he thought his pocket felt queer—uneasy-like, so he put his hand in to see."

"To feel, you mean," said Clover.

"Be quiet ! how you interrupt one !" said Jack. "He put his hand in, as I said, and there the seed had sprouted."

Well, that was good news, and he hurried on to the garden ; but all the time his pocket kept feeling queerer and queerer, till by and by the cucumber leaves began to shoot out of the pocket hole. Then the man started to run ; but the shoot grew and grew till it got down to the ground, and then it went as fast as he did. The man was scared by that time, and turned about and ran for home as fast he could go ; and the shoot ran with him all the way. And if you'll believe me," said Jack, "when he reached the house there was a great, large, big cucumber gone to seed in his pocket !"

CHAPTER XX.

It was gardening time now in earnest. The soft April sunshine began to warm the earth and to stir the heart of every leaf-bud on the trees ; and the gentle showers that came dropping down every now and then seemed almost to have more power yet. The birds were all a-flutter with eagerness and expectation, peering in among the bare branches of some of the trees, and then betaking themselves to the well-clothed evergreens for house-room and shelter ; the grass grew in the most wonderful way ; and the blue violets stood with their eyes wide open, full of sweetness and content. In the garden—the large one which was under Robin's care—many things were already planted ; peas, and such common things, as Lily said ; and even the three little gardens began to show their pretty promise of sticks and labels, for some of the hardy seeds were already in the ground. "Arge-mone" was marked upon one label, and "Hollyhock" upon another, and Prim had planted her sweet peas. Planted them with much fear and hesitation too ; for when with a good deal of trouble she had dug a trench for them four inches deep, Prim thought they might as well be buried in the centre of the earth at once.

"They'll *never* get up out of that hole, Sam !"

"Four inches deep is what Mr Vick says," answered Sam, shewing her the words in the catalogue. "The plants will bear the heat so much better."

"Bear it ! I should think they would—and be glad to get it, too, 'way down there," said Prim. "I wonder if they'll be prettier planted so, in a circle, than they would in a straight line?"

"Plant some of them both ways, and then you can judge."

"So I will!" said Prim, carefully sowing the seeds "pretty thick" in her dug-out circle. "Now, I s'pose the straight one must be just as deep."

"Of course. But cover these first," said her brother.

Prim carefully folded down the open end of her seed bag, lest the peas should take the matter into their own hands and sow themselves on the surface of the ground ; and then she gently threw in the earth with her trowel, looking up at Sam every now and then as the trench grew full to see if that depth would not do. But Sam showed no signs of relenting until all the earth was filled in smooth and even.

"Now you can go on to your straight line," he said, "and I will go and help Lily a while."

"What are you doing?" said Lily, coming up. "Oh, how pretty everything looks!"

"Sowing my sweet peas," said Prim. "That's a circle, and this is a straight line."

"Is it?" said Lily,—"I should have said it was a crooked line if you'd asked me."

"But it's so hard to draw it straight!" said Prim, standing up to look at her line, which was indeed extremely wavy, to say the least.

"Never mind—I dare say it's as good as the circle," said Lily consolingly.

"The circle's *perfect*," said Prim. "Sam drew it for me himself. He set a stick in the middle and tied a string to

it, and tied another stick to the other end of the string, and just drew it all round—so."

"For the straight line," said Sam, "you can stretch a cord between two sticks; or you can lay your rake-handle down on the bed and measure by that. Now, Lily, what are *you* about?"

"I don't know how thick to sow these seeds," said Lily. "I sowed all there were in the paper first, and then the holes looked so close together I picked up a good many of 'em."

"Picked them up—the seeds, I suppose!" said Sam. "That's a losing business. And what are these holes you talk of?"

"Why, the holes I made for the seeds," said Lily, leading the way down the hill to her garden.

"What seeds are they?"

"Only my dwarf convolvulus. O I didn't lose any of 'em—I know exactly how many there were."

Sam thought to himself that it was a very loving sort of gardening in which the seeds were all *counted*; but he said nothing except to give Lily her directions, and then walked up the hill again and towards the fence to look at Clover. Lily's counting was nothing to Clover's care. She smoothed and re-smoothed the little spot where the seeds were to go; dug it lightly up with her trowel, and then smoothed it again, breaking every smallest lump of earth. Then carefully opening her seed bag, Clover took out a little pinch of seed between her finger and thumb, and slowly, cautiously sprinkled it over the prepared bit of ground. Then making some more earth very fine, Clover sprinkled that over the seeds, pausing once or twice to consider whether it was deep enough; then patted the whole softly down with her

trowel, stuck her label at one side, and the work was done. With a little sigh of great satisfaction Clover looked up at her brother.

"Will it do, Sam?"

"Exceeding well," said her brother, smiling. "But where are your sticks?"

"What sticks?"

"Sticks to mark the boundary line of each patch of seeds, so that you may not plant one kind on top of another."

"O I never thought about that; I haven't got any," said Clover.

Sam took up a tree branch which the wind had blown off, and cut three or four little sticks—six inches long or so—with which Clover at once fenced in her seeds.

"How pretty it looks!" she said, slipping her hand into her brother's; "and how wonderful it is, Sam! Just to think what my little seeds will be next time I see them!"

"Ay!" said Sam, clasping the little hand tight, but speaking in a musing way, as if hardly thinking of her: "'That thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be.' 'In hope of a glorious resurrection'—that is it, dear. And the earth seems but a soft, quiet bed in the sunshine of such a promise."

Clover looked at him earnestly, and then her eyes flushed, and she looked down at her garden again quite silently, for she was a little body of few words. Or perhaps I should say, of fewer words than thoughts. "In hope of a glorious resurrection—yes, that was it, certainly; but Clover had never known what those words meant before.

"What will these flowers be like, Clover?" said Sam, suddenly.

"O I don't know," said Clover; "the catalogue doesn't tell. Only they will be sweet and white."

"Yes," Sam repeated, as he walked slowly away, swinging Clover's hand softly back and forth in his own, "'sweet and white,' that is all it tells. 'For it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know'—we who love Jesus—'that when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is,'"

One little word among all these went straight to Clover's heart; that little word "we." "'We who love Jesus,'" her brother had said; oh, did she?

I cannot tell you what joy it was when the plants began to come up in the window-boxes. I think the very first of all was the crumpled pink leaf of an abronia,—"*as pretty as a flower*," Prim declared, for the abronias belonged to her. Then in Lily's box appeared a quite different beauty—small, compact, and round; a canna shoot, with its white tip above the lovely green line. Lily was what Jack called "*frantic*" in her delight. Nothing quite equal to these in beauty was seen in Clover's box at first; but the hyacinth beans sent up their broad seed leaves, which Sam called "*cotyledons*," and Jack declared to be only the two halves of the bean itself. Then the zinnias came forth, bright and strong; and the stocks—little tiny flat seeds that they were—burst out with such broad, large cotyledons, that Clover wondered over them. Clover did a great deal of thinking in those days, and never could go near her box or her garden without remembering the words Sam had spoken down by the fence. Jack declared that gardening had spoiled all his three sisters, for Lily was crazy, and Prim in a dream, and Clover in such a brown study that you could get nothing out of her. "*Ex-*

cept moral lectures," Jack would add by way of conclusion.

By and by the earth which covered Prim's ipomœa seeds began to rise up in a most remarkable manner ; a little heap here, and another there, not quite smooth, but inclined to crack open at the top.

"It's just like what mamma said!" exclaimed Prim, in her excitement. "Oh, do you think it can be the seeds?"

"Not a doubt of it," replied Sam, to whom this appeal was made. And from that time, whoever wanted Prim was sure to find her at the window, gazing down upon the pot that held her ipomœa seeds.

Lily, too, made a great discovery. A similar disturbance of the earth in one of her flower pots had been followed by the sudden appearance of two little green leaves on a very long stalk ; so long indeed that it could hardly hold itself up. Lily thought it must be the newest and rarest of plants, there was but one in the pot, and that grew so fast.

"Just look, Sam!" she said, "is that one of my asters?"

"Aster, indeed!" said Sam, with an expression of great contempt. And before Lily well knew what he was about, Sam had raised the pane of glass, pulled up the rare plant, and flung it out of the window.

"Oh, Sam, Sam!" was all Lily could say, "what *did* you do that for?"

"What did I do it for? why, you do not want to grow weeds, I suppose?"

"Was *that* a weed?"

"That was a weed."

"Well, I'll never trust anything again," said Lily. And

to be sure she did not ; for when a few days after one of the pots became suddenly full of green leaves upon long stalks, Lily began to root them out with an unsparing hand ; but this time it was Sam who cried "stop !"

"They're only weeds," said Lily.

"They're only your scarlet flax," said Sam. "Never mind, you have lost but a few."

"Oh dear ! oh dear !" said poor Lily, "what am I to do ! I thought weeds and flowers were different—and they're just alike !"

"No, they are not," said Sam ; "but that is one of the things you have got to learn. A gardener knows a weed from a flower by a sort of instinct, even when it first comes up ; though it is such a little bit of a thing, and may be of a kind he has never seen before. He will recognise one weed in a whole tuft of flowers, or one flower in a whole tuft of weeds."

"But *how* ?" said Lily. "Tell me how ?"

"Ah, that I cannot do ; that you must learn," said Sam : "I could as soon give you directions for finding out a real lady or gentleman. It's not because of their dress, it's not because of their place—you just *feel* the difference. And so it is with weeds."

CHAPTER XXI.

IN the very crisis of the work Sam went away ; just, as Lily said, when everything wanted him. There were more seeds to sow, and there were young plants to put out ; above all, there were weeds which must *not* be put out. For even in those little flower-pots in the boxes weeds grew, fast and thick, and must be constantly pulled up. This was easy enough when the flower plants were there too, and the children soon learned to know many of the rightful owners of the soil ; but in a pot where the weeds sprung first, before the flowers, there was great need of care. And there was nobody to consult with now ; Sam was to be gone a month, and no one else could take his place, so the children were obliged to make use of all the wits they had. What grave questions arose, and were debated there in the window-seat ! as, whether it was yet too cold to plant out the little seedlings ; whether they needed water ; and the like. Mrs May told them she had always heard that most young plants should not be transplanted until they had their second pair of leaves ; but it seemed as if these never would come : and besides, who could tell whether this precious selection could be fairly classed under the head of "most young plants ?" So the discussions were endless.

Then Mr May, looking over the boxes one morning, affirmed that they had too much heat, and that Lily's flax and

other things were running up as tall and slim as she was herself, instead of being stout, thrifty plants.

"But what shall we do with 'em, papa?" said Lily.

"Take them out of the boxes and set them on a table, I should," said Mr May. "They want air, poor things."

Now it was not endurable to have such plants called "poor things;" so at once the pots were taken out, and the boxes set away, though Clover's mind was not at all at rest on the subject. Primrose had been quite uneasy about her ipomœas, which after that first cracking of the ground above their heads had made little progress; and she had (quite privately) given that particular flower pot more than one decided watering or soaking; and still the plants did not come.

But the work out of doors began to be the most interesting now; and each child went about it so entirely after her own fashion, that the gardens were, as Mr May had said, a study. Clover, as usual, was perfectly neat and methodical,—in her garden, as elsewhere, all she touched fell into order, as if under the wand of the old fairy herself. She had found a neglected basket in the garret, wide and long, without a cover, and with a handle; and this basket being the desire of nobody else, became straightway the comfort of Clover. She dusted it, and washed it, and rubbed it up; tying some of her own odds and ends of red ribbon at the handle; both to cover up a few breaks and damages, and to take off the look of a common basket, which it undeniably had. Then with labels and papers of seeds at one end, and her little trowel in the other, Clover went to her garden in full content of heart, and sowed and planted with a precision which few people ever attempted before. True, Sam had told her that it was best to sow the seeds rather thicker than the

plants must stand, for some might not grow, and some young plants might die,—they could be thinned out afterwards to the proper distance. But still Clover believed in her heart that it was best to sow with the utmost regularity, putting seeds at precisely six inches from each other, if the plants were to stand precisely one foot ; and anybody who had peeped into her basket would have seen several small neat measuring sticks of different lengths. Of course no very small seeds could be planted in this way, and such gave Clover an amount of thought and consideration that was only equalled by her enjoyment. In the basket, too, lay a neat list of all the kinds she had, each one marked “two feet,” or “six inches high,” or “trailing ;” along with sundry cabalistic signs that the flower would be blue, white, or yellow. Some were in the pots at the house, some here in the basket ; and the arranging of colours, and the placing of tall plants in the centre, and of vines by the fence ; of single plants here, and of masses there, gave Clover’s patient imagination more work than I can tell you.

Nothing of this sort went on in Lily’s sphere. Lily stuffed her pocket with seed bags, caught up her trowel in one hand and her bonnet in the other, rushed down to her garden as if the whole spring work rested on her little shoulders, and then sowed and labeled with infinite zeal indeed, but without a particle of consideration. She would finish off more patches in ten minutes than Clover in a whole morning’s work ; and her seeds had all been planted some days before Clover intrusted the last of her treasures to the brown earth, “in hope of a glorious resurrection.”

Little Primrose, on her part, managed her garden as she did everything else, in a sort of a rosy dream—it was all poetry to Primrose, though she did not know it. No com-

mon questions about colour and height ever troubled her head. She had studied the catalogue descriptions until each flower was personified to her thoughts ; and the point was not at all merely whether datura and œnothera would contrast well if planted near together, but each must be placed for its own sake ; the œnotheras must show their wonderful white flowers *here*, close by the green grass border, and a little withdrawn from public observation ; and the pansies must stand *here*, where mamma could see them from the bow-window. So Prim planted and mused, and mused and planted, and lived a garden life that was about half dream and half sunlight.

Great was the joy when Sam came home, bringing with him the three rose bushes—a white, a crimson, and a blush. Each was leading a rather weary existence in a flower pot just then, and looked faint hearted accordingly ; but Sam said they were good, strong plants, and would grow well as soon as they had a chance.

“I shall put mine in the very middle of my garden—the beauty !” said Lily.

“I shall put mine close to the walk, so that I can smell the roses,” said Primrose.

Clover said nothing, but she thought of a place between her sweet alyssum and mignonnette—the very place of places for a rose!—and her cheeks glowed with pleasure.

“Now we can use our spades,” said Lily, “to dig the holes.”

Sam said nothing to dispute that ; but when they all went out next morning, carrying the roses, he took his spade too, and his wheel-barrow, and when Lily had dug a hole about the size of the flower pot that held her rose Sam fell to work,

nor ever stopped till he had made the hole at least a foot deep and more than that across.

"If you think I'm going to plant my rose down *there*," said Lily, "you're just mistaken. I know better."

"It's worse than my sweet peas," said Primrose.

Sam laughed and bade them have patience; and then he threw in a quantity of black stuff from his wheel-barrow, filling the hole half full. Upon this again he threw some of the earth that lay round the edge of the hole, and then mixed the whole well together, digging it up again and again.

"Now you can plant your rose," he said to Lily.

"Sam, what was all that for," said Clover.

"Roses are great feeders—they want a very rich soil, well prepared. Lily, don't pull your rose out of the pot—you'll break off all the roots."

There seemed some danger of that, indeed, for Lily had taken her rose by the stem and was trying to shake the pot off.

"How am I to get it out, then?" she said, setting down the unfortunate rose. "It sticks."

"Sticks!" said Sam—"of course it does; the earth is full of little roots, all matted and twined together. See—take this old knife and slip it round the edge—so—as close to the pot as possible. Now lay your hand close on the top of the pot, with the rose stem between your fingers—so. Hold it tight, and with your other hand gently turn the pot upside down,—there—you see the rose with its ball of earth is safe in your left hand, and the pot is loose and can be taken away."

"Why, how nice!" said Lily. "But the ball of earth *stay* a ball, Sam,—it crumbles all to pieces."

"That is because you shook it so unceremoniously in the first place. Never mind—you'll know better next time. But don't let it crumble any more than you can help, set it gently down in the middle of your hole, and hold the stem up quite straight. No, not so deep; throw in a little more earth; that part of the rose where the stem joins the root—the crown it is called—must be just at the surface of the earth. Now cover the roots nicely, and make all even and smooth; and then you will want to take your rake and rake out our footsteps, and put things in neat order again."

"I should think so!" said Lily. "What a muss!"

"What have you been planting here?" said Sam, walking round the garden and looking at some tiny green things that stood hanging their heads sadly.

"O flax, and things," said Lily. "Those are pinks."

"But what makes them droop so?—did you treat them as you did your rose?"

"I pulled them up, of course," said Lily. "There was nothing else I could do. They had to be separated."

"But pulling them up breaks off the little precious roots. How did you do with yours, Clover?"

"I tried a tea spoon first," said Clover, blushing; "and then I thought that was too large, and I got a little, little flat stick, and stuck that down into the pot like a spade."

"Very good," said Sam. "Lily, did you water your plants?"

"O yes, the minute I'd set 'em out," said Lily.

"And shaded them?"

"No, I didn't know anything about that," said Lily. "I just gave 'em a good soaking at the time, and then every morning since."

"Ah!" said Sam, "they look like it. Flowers, like some

other people, often need less defence from their enemies than their friends. Now take a lesson for next time. Take up each little plant very carefully—Clover has told you how—with as much earth as possible about its roots. Then dig a hole, a little larger than the plant, and set it in, spreading out the roots, or arranging them, as naturally as you can; hold up the plant quite straight, and throw the earth in very gently, and press it lightly down. Then water it gently and thoroughly, and if it is a sunny day shade it with an old flower-pot, or a bit of shingle, or even a hood of paper held in a split stick. Shade it for several days, but always uncover it by night, that the plant may have dew and fresh air. Set out your plants, if you *can*, just before a rain; but if they need further watering, give it to them always just at evening, after the sun is off."

"Well!" said Lily, "I suppose Clover will put all that in *her* head, but it's by no means certain that I shall in mine. Now let's go and plant the other roses."

"Sam," said Clover as they walked off, "what made you cut off that piece of Lily's rose root?"

"It was broken," said Sam; "and a broken root does only harm. Any broken or bruised root should be cut smoothly off before planting."

CHAPTER XXII.

It does happen, little readers, that misfortunes as well as mistakes are sometimes found in flower gardens. The best seed, the best catalogue of directions, the best care, the utmost patience, will not always bring perfect success ; and it is just as well to know this beforehand, and not expect too much. Part of the seeds will not come up, perhaps some of the little plants will hang their heads and die when they are transplanted. Then your little dog scratches up one young plant to bury his dinner bone, and pussy breaks down another in some leap after a flying grasshopper. All these things will be now and then ; and so, without indulging melancholy expectations, it is yet well to have those little herbs of patience and perseverance growing in the corner of every garden, and to pluck one or two of their small, sweet leaves whenever some more favourite plant is missing.

Lily said she thought everything happened in her garden that could happen anywhere ; and yet that was not true, for Primrose and Clover had each a special variety or two of gardening sorrows. The first trial—which indeed came to all pretty much alike—was a succession of cold, biting rough-edged winds. The little seedlings, newly set out, could make no resistance ; the wind swept over them with a kind of blasting effect, beating them down, and almost cutting them off at the root. That part of the stem withered and turned white, and the little seedling never held up its

head again. Lily declared the wind gave her pinks a bite every time he came along, and that was very often in those days. Close following on the heels of the wind came the rain—pouring, driving, flooding the garden beds, and half drowning those plants that had survived the wind. It was a great pity, Clover said, that the very first of her flower work should be in such a very uncommon season, for she could hardly tell now whether she had done the work well or ill. Between whiles, when the rain held up or the wind ceased for a little, the children would run out to see what could be done—carefully covering pinks and petunias with all the little flower pots they could find, scraping up the earth which the rain had washed away from their roots, and giving the weary little seedlings a world of pity and tender encouragement. And thus nursed and cared for, and with the help of a sunshiny day now and then, some of the little plants looked up again, and began to grow and thrive. Small fresh green leaves appeared at the top of some of the tiny stems, and every thing seemed hopeful. A few of the most tender plants were not yet set out; a few of the half-hardy kinds were not yet planted; and several of the other seed bags were not quite empty; for Sam had advised the children not to sow all of each sort at once, but to keep back a few for a second planting, lest the first should not do well. Many councils had been held about the weather, and whether it was time yet to venture the last of the precious seed treasure in the ground.

“I think I’ll plant all mine to-day,” said Lily, kneeling with one knee on the low window-seat and looking out at the sky, where the wind was struggling with rain clouds. “It’s getting all blue off there in the west, and papa said if it did we should have a fine day.”

"But the ground will be so wet," said the prudent Clover. "It's so hard to sow the seeds nicely when the ground's wet."

"Well—to-morrow, then," said Lily. "Look, Clover, isn't that the Jarvis carriage driving along the road? And it's turning down here, I do declare!—and Maria's inside!"

The carriage came on, and stopped at the little gate, and Miss Maria got out and picked her way delicately up to the house over the smooth, damp gravel walk.

"Well!" she said to her three friends, who were gathered at the door to meet her, "I've come to stay all day. Aren't you glad? My father said he didn't think it would rain; and if it did, you know, it couldn't touch me in the coach. How do you do?"

"O we're well," said Lily.

"Well, so am I," said Maria. "My mother thought it was too early to come, because you wouldn't be dressed, but that don't matter, you know; you can dress while I'm here, and then I can see all your frocks."

"Don't you want to come and look at our gardens," said Clover, "before you take your hat off? We always go just as soon as it stops raining, to see if the plants have grown."

"Why, don't plants always grow?" said Maria, as she followed them out. "Our garden's always full, I'm sure."

"Look! look!" cried little Primrose, running on before—"look, Clover! look, Lily! they're coming up!"

"Who's coming?" said Maria Jarvis. "Company? You'd better run in then and dress as fast as you can; but it's very early for visitors. *Our* company never comes till quite late."

"We never dress in the morning, no matter who comes," said Clover. "Oh *do* just look how pretty!—Prim's sweet peas are coming up!" And pretty indeed the soft

green shoots were, breaking their way through the brown mould.

"I thought they would never come," said Primrose, bending over them in her delight. "I'd planted 'em so very deep : and now here they are ! Do you have a great many sweet peas, Maria ?"

"We don't have any," said Maria ; "they're old-fashioned. And our gardener thinks old-fashioned flowers are dreadful. He likes all the new things. My aunt—she's ever so funny herself, and she's been staying with us a while—she asked William where the sweet peas were planted, and William looked real angry, and he said, "We haven't such a thing on the whole place, ma'am, I am happy to say !"

"Sam says they are not common," remarked little Primrose, innocently ; "but I got a whole paperful from Mr Vick for five cents, and now they've come up. I'm so glad !"

"Dear me ! what little bits of places !" said Maria, walking on to the next garden. "I suppose you don't have more than two or three sorts of flowers ?"

"Indeed we do !" said Clover, flushing a little. "I have a dozen sorts, and the others have almost as many. I shall plant out hyacinth beans and canary-bird vine along the fence. They're growing in pots now."

"Hyacinth beans !" said Maria ; "I never heard of such things. It sounds just like vegetables. Are they good to eat ?"

"I don't think anybody 'll ever eat *my* hyacinth beans," said Clover, a little indignantly.

"Well, you needn't be angry," said Maria ; "it sounds so funny, you know, to have a flower garden all full of beans and peas. We don't have anything but fuchsias, and geraniums, and Japan lilies, and such things."





"Just give her a comfortable chair, where she could spread out her flounces."—P. 157.

The children were silent ; glowing visions of what "such things" might mean flashed before their eyes ; and for a minute the small flower bed, with its one rose bush, its little patches of hardy seedlings, lost colour and promise together. Then Clover glanced towards the corner where mentally she kept her "sweet herbs," and the gentle fragrance of patience and brotherly kindness seemed to set things right in a moment.

"O you have a grand garden," she said, cheerfully, "and ours will never be that, I suppose. But I guess they'll be beautiful by and by, when the things grow. Just look how strong my zinnias are !"

"Oh, you've got zinnias !" said Maria ; "are they double ones ? William says double zinnias are very good for some places."

"Well, I hope this is one of the places," said Clover, laughing. "Now come down and see Lily's garden."

"The sun's so hot," pleaded Maria,— "and I dropped my veil in the house. And I don't know what my mother would do if I should get freckled. I always do freckle in the sun."

To avoid such a dire misfortune they all turned back into the house, and Lily was comforted for the slight to her garden by the thought that she should not hear any of her flowers called vegetables.

It was an easy matter to entertain their little guest—that was one thing. Just give her a comfortable chair, where she could spread out her flounces ; place her in a good light, where her boot tassels and embroidered petticoat were likely to be seen now and then, and let her talk ; and the small cup which Maria Jarvis kept for her happiness would be quite full. But the other children grew very weary as the day went on ; rare flowers were not the pleasantest things to hear

of, on the whole, and the novelty of dresses and trimmings soon wore off; so that when dinner was over, and the coach came and Maria got in, Clover saw her drive away with a deep sigh of relief; and even Lily threw her arms over her head and exclaimed,—

“Oh dear! I’m *so* tired!”

“Tired of your best friend!” said Jack; “or is it that you can’t wait till the time comes for you to go and spend Thursday with her? Poor Lily!”

“I’m in no hurry at all for Thursday to come,” said Lily, rather sharply.

“I’m glad she’s not coming *here* on Thursday,” said little Primrose. “Maria said my sweet peas were old-fashioned. I should like to know what she is!”

“Why, she is—new-fashioned, if you really want to know,” said Sam, laughing. “I guess she’s right about the sweet-peas, Prim. I have little doubt that sweet-peas grew and blossomed in Eden, and that’s being *quite* old-fashioned.”

Prim’s face unbent into a smile.

“Sam, you’re so nice!” she said.

“Now that’s what I call a compliment,” said her brother, making a low bow. “What is Clover thinking of so busily?”

Clover flushed and hesitated. “Nothing—only I want some more herbs in my garden, Sam. I do believe Maria Jarvis made me a little bit discontented with my dear garden. It is such a shame!” said Clover, her voice choking a little. Sam put his arms round her and patted the hot cheeks softly.

“Let’s go out and have a good walk,” he said, on a sudden; “let us see what the wayside will show us, and hear what the wind will say to us. Come!”

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE motto of that afternoon might have been :

“ Who knows whither the clouds have fled ?
In the unscarred heaven they leave no wake ;
And the eyes forget the tears they have shed—
The heart forgets its sorow and ache.”

For everything was in a glory of freshness and sweetness : the sky was brilliantly blue ; and the thirsty leaves had either drunk up all the rain drops, or wore them now as jewels in the sunshine.

The children fairly danced along the road ; darting hither and thither after dandelions and butter-cups and chickweed ; laughing at the bull-frogs in the wayside ditches, and studying themselves in the little pools of water that spotted the muddy road.

“ What *have* you got in that little basket, Sam ?” said Primrose, coming to his side with both hands full of spring beauties. “ Is it to hold flowers ?”

“ Not now ; you may put them in by and by.”

“ But what’s in it now ?”

“ Some jelly from mamma, for an ailing child.”

“ Ailing,” said Lily. “ What’s ailing ?”

“ He is not always very sick, but will probably never be well.”

“ Poor child !” said Lily, taking a jump over a little bright pool in her way. “ It’s nice of mamma to send him jelly

Sam, we're going to plant all the rest of our seeds to-morrow."

"Another time," said Sam, "try and plant just before rather than just after a rain. The ground is harder to work."

"Harder, because it's softer," said Lily.

"I did think of sowing mine yesterday," said Clover; "but it was so cold—and I didn't want to run any risks. Sam, when these are planted—sowed, I mean—and all the rest of my little seedlings are set out, my garden will be *quite* full. I've just left a place for each kind, all marked out and ready."

"And that's all the spare room you have?"

"Every bit. Except—there—there's one other little place," said Clover hesitating.

"What is that for?"

"For—the geranium, you know," said Clover.

"Oh, to be sure, the geranium! I've not forgotten my promise; but the weather has been too cold for such tender things."

"I think our gardens will be splendid," said Primrose, "if Maria Jarvis *does* call 'em queer little places."

"Yes, mine is making quite a show already," said Lily; "it's getting all green. I saw it this morning from the window."

Sam uttered one of his provoking "Ah's!" and inquired whether it was green with flowers or weeds.

"Why, it can't be weeds, of course," said Lily; "I've just planted my flowers there, and there weren't any weeds even in sight."

"I pulled up two out of my garden," said Clover, shaking her head. "Sam, where do weeds come from?"

"They come from seeds ; and the earth is full of the seeds, just as our hearts are full of seed thoughts and tempers, all ready to spring and grow the moment they have a chance. Then other seeds come sailing along on the wings of the wind, and drop down and lodge here and there ; as some bad thought or impulse drops into our hearts from a poor book or a silly conversation. And as if that was not enough, we ourselves go and walk in weedy places—into foolish company, and bring home weed seeds or sin seeds, or folly seeds, in plenty."

As Sam spoke he lifted the corner of Lily's short cloak, and behold it was stuck full of burs !

"Well, what now ?" said Lily. "Tiresome things ! they would get on."

"You are taking them home to plant," said Sam.

"To plant !" cried Clover, in terror. "Oh, stop, Lily ; let me pick them off !"

"If you throw them by the road side they will grow there, and molest future travellers," said Sam. "Never help spread a bad thing."

"But what shall I do then ?" said Lily.

"Wear them patiently till we get to a fire, and then pick them off and burn them."

Lily grumbled a little at that ; but she had not long to wait. A few steps more brought them to a little bit of a red house by the way-side, with only an old fence between it and the road. Sam pushed open the little gate and went in, and there, in the morsel of a courtyard before the house door was a child at work ; earnestly, patiently, with great toil and effort, digging up the ground with an old fire shovel. He stood up at the sound of the gate latch, shewing a pale little face, to which not even his work had brought a flush ; but

it came now, a flush of great gladness, as he looked at Sam.

"Well, Dick, how does your garden grow?" Sam asked, taking the little thin hand in his own.

"I've got it most dug, sir; and my morning-glory seeds is up. They'll cover the fence, mother says. There's a blue seed and a white seed."

Two morning-glory seeds! It was a thing to see Clover's face when she heard that, and remembered her little paper bags full of precious hyacinth beans and canary-bird vine.

"Is that all you have to plant?" inquired Sam.

"Jane Lefferts gave me some marigold seeds," said the child. "There was six o' *them*: all red and brown and yellow *they'll* be." And stimulated by the thought of the marigold flowers, little Dick plied his old shovel with great zeal; then stopped for breath.

"How do you do to-day, Dick?" said Sam, kindly.

"Better, sometimes, and sometimes worse," said Dick, with a smile.

"Dick, do you love flowers *very* much?" said little Primrose, sidling up to him with her wistful look.

"Oh, better'n anything!" said Dick. "Just think, when the morning-glories runs all over the fence!"

Primrose drew a long breath of wonder and pity and sympathy, mingled with two or three other things that she herself did not know, looking up with an appealing face to Clover.

"It's a grand day for your garden to-day," said Sam.

"Yes," said Dick, with a happy look. "And just think: my mother says the sun's just as bright and the rain's just as sweet here on my seeds as in Mr Jarvis's big garden."

"Ay" said Sam, musingly; "the Lord maketh His sun

to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

"Mother says that's why it's all good, because God sends it," said Dick. "And she thinks he'll make my flowers grow, because I love him and she loves him."

It was such a new idea, you should have seen the three children stand in silent wonder!

"Will *that* make 'em grow?" said Primrose, thinking of a patch in her own little garden where the seeds had not come up. But Dick gave her no help out of the difficulty.

"It must be that with mine," he said, "'cause there's nothing else. Mother says *we* never get anything any other way."

"Happy people you and your mother are," said Sam. "Well, Dick, God has sent you something else to-day—he told my mother to make you some jelly, and to put a loaf of nice white bread in the basket too. So you can thank him and nobody else. And whatever you want just tell him, and he'll know just the best person to send with it." And Sam set down the little basket on the doorstep and strode off into the road again, followed by his wondering little sisters.

"Why, Sam," said Primrose, "how did God tell mamma?"

"In her heart," said Sam, promptly.

"Oh dear!" said Lily; "if he should tell me that Dick wants some of my flower seeds, what should I do?"

Clover walked silently on, the pink flush on her cheeks deepening and deepening.

"You say such queer things, Sam," said Lily. "What made you say I was carrying those burs home to plant? I wasn't at all."

"Nobody can carry weed seeds or habit seeds about with

him and not sow them, even when he least intends it," said Sam. "But now, chicks, see here—I'm going to give you a lesson in the art of making geranium cuttings. Come and sit down on these stones, and we'll rest and learn together."

"Where are the geraniums to come from?" said Lily, as the young ones grouped themselves round him."

"Out of my pocket," said Sam, taking out a parcel, from which he unfolded a long stem of geranium.

"Why, that's a cutting itself," said Lily. "*That* won't grow."

"Will you give your share of it to Dick?" said her brother, opening his knife.

"No I won't," said Lily; "so you needn't ask me."

"I'll prepare Prim's cutting for her," said Sam, "because her hands are hardly strong enough to manage the knife; and you two older ones can look on and learn to do it for yourselves."

So Sam first cut the geranium shoot in three pieces, and giving one to Lily and Clover, he began to prepare the other for planting.

"First of all, and most important of all," said Sam, "you must make a perfectly clean cut at the bottom of the shoot."

"What's a clean cut?" said Lily.

"A perfectly smooth cut, with no rough edges. Cut straight across, and just below a joint. A joint is that part of the stem where a leaf springs out. Make this cut quite smooth and close, and then trim off the lower leaves—so. Don't cut them close to the stem, but leave a bit of the foot-stalk an inch long; and leave three or four full leaves untouched at the top. Then set the lower end of the cuttings in soft, nicely-prepared earth, in the open ground or round the side of a flower pot; put it down deep as the

second joint, and press the earth *very* firmly round it. And then never let it be jarred or moved from its firmness. Then keep the earth a little damp—not wet; and if the sun is very hot shade the cutting for a few days, and your geranium will be almost certain to grow.”

With earnest eyes the children watched him; with eager fingers Clover and Lily took the knife, and trimmed and prepared the two little cuttings; and then they all rose up and walked towards home.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN Mr May left the breakfast room next morning Clover softly followed him into the hall.

"Papa, did you say Mr Jarvis sent you some young plants yesterday?"

"He did send me some, my dear—I don't remember mentioning it."

"Papa, weren't they wilted? will they grow?"

"They were quite fresh, and *ought* to grow," said Mr May. "Jarvis has a capital gardener, and the plants were put up in first-rate style."

"How were they put up, papa? Will you tell me?" said Clover.

"Why, you curious little mouse," said her father laughing, "what have you to do with my plants?—they were strawberry plants, not flowers."

"Yes—I know," said Clover, with a blush; "but will you please tell me, papa?"

"Well then," said Mr May, "they were taken out of the ground very carefully, with the roots uninjured and as much earth as possible clinging to them; and then they were wrapped up, tops and all, in a large cabbage leaf. There is nothing better than cabbage leaves, my dear, for the purpose." And with a kiss and another laugh Mr May stepped into his buggy and drove away. Clover stood still

thinking for a minute, and then went quietly back into the breakfast room and began her lessons.

But it might have been seen that morning that Clover was unusually eager to have the lessons end, and never put in the delay of a single question, nor asked for a talk when the recitations were finished ; but wore such a grave, preoccupied face all the time, that if she had made any number of mistakes you would hardly have wondered. Everything went on with the most perfect correctness, however ; except that once, in answer to some question in Natural Philosophy, Clover began :

“Take a cabbage leaf—” and then with crimson cheeks stopped short and began again, in the midst of a hearty laugh from everybody else.

So the morning passed by, and dinner time came ; and after dinner Mrs May proposed a walk.

“Do you *wish* me to go, mamma?” Clover said, anxiously.

“Look out at the sunlight—does not that persuade you?” said her mother.

“Yes, mamma, it’s lovely, but—”

“But you like books still better. I do not wish you to read away the afternoon, Clover.”

“I will not read, mamma.”

“Garden work, then ? O well, do just as you like, my dear.”

So the others set off without her, and Clover watched them for a minute with wistful eyes ; then put on her business face again, and turned back into the house.

The first thing was to get one of her seed bags and examine it very closely ; then laying that on the table for a pattern Clover turned over all her stores of odds and ends to find some bits of smooth brown paper, greatly to the discomfort

of morsels of ribband and scraps of silk, which were suddenly turned out of house and home. The bottle of mucilage came next upon the table ; then a pair of scissors and pen and ink ; and Clover sat down to her work.

Did you ever try to make little brown paper bags for flower seeds ? It is an easy matter when you know how ; but Clover found that it may make unwonted fingers tremble. It was so hard to cut the paper just even, and to fold it in the middle ; and to cut off one edge just enough, and then to fold down over it the other edge, with mucilage between. Then sometimes she put on too much of this, and it ran out and made her fingers sticky ; or one corner of paper started up, as much as to say, "There's nothing here to hold *me* fast !" Or the pieces of paper were too small, and she had to make the two sides of her bag separate, and so have a seam all round. The sun was far on his afternoon path when Clover looked down with a sigh and a smile, first at her smeared fingers, and then at six little paper bags, spread out on the rug to dry.

She ran off up-stairs to wash her hands, and then taking the bags up one by one, wrote on them with great pains and difficulty (it was such a short way across the bag, and the names were so long !) the titles of some of her beloved flower seeds. Then carefully took from her own store three or four zinnia seeds, and as many of helichrysum, and so on till the six bags had each a treasure within ; folded down the top of each that not one precious seed might escape ; and wrapped up all the six in the largest of her bits of brown paper.

But the work was not done yet. Clover looked fondly at her little package for a minute, then put it in her pocket and ran away to the great garden to beg Roger for a cabbage

leaf, and went down to her own garden with the air of one whose mind is made up.

It was a little bit of a trial to take up one after another of the young plants that were growing so finely ; but if Clover heaved a sigh once or twice she never wavered ; going steadily on from one patch of pinks to another, and then to stocks, and then to amaranthus ; laying each little seedling carefully in the cabbage leaf, and smoothing down neatly the spot where it had been. Then back to the tool-house where a few flower pots yet remained, and there took out balsams and other dainty things, until the leaf was quite full. Carefully folding the sides together and binding it all round with a soft string, Clover laid it by her seed package, brought out Mr Vick's catalogue and sat down to write. With fingers that trembled from fatigue now, going over the most needful directions for each kind of plant.

The shadows were long, the sunlight fast climbing up the hills, when at last Clover caught up her two parcels and her paper of directions, and ran out to the carriage-house. Hannibal was there, fingering his harness, singing to keep himself company.

"O Hannibal !" said his breathless little mistress, "I thought I heard papa say you were going to the Corners to-night ?"

"Sure, Miss Clo' ! Wid de harness," explained Hannibal.

"And do you know where little Dick Nobody lives ?" said Clover.

"Sartin," Hannibal replied. "Close by de road, not de common road, but de uncommon. Working dere, right in front, de chile is, most days."

"Then please take him all these," said Clover, laying her

little parcels in the great black hand of the astonished Hannibal. "And this paper'll tell him what to do with them."

Hannibal looked and pondered.

"S'pose he ask, 'Where they all come from?' Then I say, 'Out o' Miss Clo's own garden, Dick,' hey?"

"Oh, maybe he won't ask," said Clover, blushing. "And I've got more, you know. You'll take them for me, Hannibal?"

"Sure!" said the old coachman, with shining eyes, "safe as little Miss Clo' could herself. What'll de young lady put where these come from now? Sort o' look empty, won't it?"

A fluttering shadow passed over the child's face for a minute, then she looked up and smiled.

"I've got some of all the kinds," she said, "and they're growing beautifully. So maybe they'll fill it all up." And away she ran to the house, and set off along the road to meet the walking party, who were just coming over the brow of the hill.

A strange thing happened that very night. A wandering squirrel, having, it is supposed, no business where he ought to be, came where he had no business to be, even into the tool-house, among the children's plants. The door was fast shut, and so was the window; but the squirrel found for himself a large knot hole in one of the boards, and through it he went, with only one whisk of his tail. Then fell to peering about in the most impertinent manner, to see if there was anything fit for his squirrelship to eat; and behold, in one corner, a barrel of pine cones! gathered and stored away there for kindling, or some such purpose. What a feast! the squirrel bit off the little scales of the pine cones, eating

the spicy seeds that lay beneath, until he was tired and thirsty too. Something fresh was needed after so much dry provision—an apple, or a green leaf or two. Certainly there was something green in those flower pots—and away went the squirrel, whisk and skip and hop ; then paused at the pot which held Prim's abronia plants, and deliberately eat them up, every one.

No one saw the squirrel do this ; only the pine cones told their tale ; and when Prim came out next day for her precious abronias, meaning to plant them at once in the open ground, there was nothing but a pot of brown earth.

"Oh dear ! oh dear !" cried little Primrose, "somebody has just come and stolen my abronias, pot and all ! And he's left another pot here, to make believe."

There was a great commotion.

"It's really an exciting thing," said Jack, beginning to take an interest in the gardens for the first time. "It's worth something to have your plants stolen. Gives 'em quite a dignity—makes something of 'em."

"It don't make much of me !" said poor little Primrose. "Oh, who could have stolen 'em !"

"Nobody stole them," said her brother Sam, who had been giving the flower pot a close examination ; "I mean no person. Look—here are the roots in the ground still."

And so they were, and the cut top of each tiny stem showed mournfully through the brown earth. Then the pine cone scales were found, and the squirrel declared to be the culprit ; but to bring him to justice was, as Jack said, quite another affair. Indeed, Primrose was not sure that she wished it ; though every abronia plant was gone, and it was too late in the season to plant more.

CHAPTER XXV.

SAM might well talk about the weeds ! Oh, how they grew . The flowers might break beneath the harsh wind, or dry up in the sun's fierce rays, but nothing hurt the weeds. In sunshine, in cloud—cold or hot, wet or dry—no matter what the weather was, it suited the weeds—which to be sure proved, as Jack said, that they were of an extremely amiable disposition, and made the best of everything ; but Lily said, if that were so, she thought it was much better to be cross, for what good did *such* amiability do any one ?

The weeds gave Lily a great deal of trouble. First of all, to find them out ; for when pinks lived in a nest of sorrel, who could tell which was which ? at least of such young gardeners. Then chickweed looked " so like a flower " when it first came up ; and thistles had such beautiful white and green leaves ; and other mischievous things dressed themselves with such very innocent appearances, that before she knew it poor Lily's weedless garden showed sorrel and chickweed and mallows enough to supply the county. So Jack said.

Lily fought the invaders bravely ; hoeing up some, and grubbing up others, and uprooting the very obstinate ones with her little weeding fork. At first she tried only the hoe ; and before long every weed had its head cut off, and the ground was raked smooth again. Lily was delighted.

" I don't think the weeds matter much, after all," she said ;

"I've got rid of them already. Oh, aren't my poor pinks glad?"

"Glad to have a breathing spell," said her brother Sam; "but how long do you think it will take your weeds to grow up again?"

"Don't call 'em *my* weeds," said Lily—"how long? why, they won't come at all; I've cut their heads off."

"And what do you think sorrel cares for that? It's a hydra—with a hundred heads."

"Well, I believe that's true," said Lily; "I never saw such stuff. The roots just run on and on, all over the ground, and there's a head everywhere. But I have cut 'em all off."

"Look here," said Sam, digging up a trowelful of earth—"here are any number of *underground* heads—little tufts of young white leaves ready to start up with the first shower. You did not hoe deep enough."

"I guess I did, though," said Lily. "Why, I had my shoes just covered the whole time."

"Had your shoes covered! How did that come about, pray?"

"Why—so," said Lily, taking her hoe and walking backward, hoeing the earth towards her at every step.

"But that is not the way to hoe," said Sam; "you must walk forward instead of back, else you hoe the earth and cut the weeds right over the uncut, and cover them all up."

"Yes, that's just what I did," said Lily, "and it was very troublesome. I couldn't tell where I had been."

"Well, do the other way next time," said Sam; "this ground will want hoeing again in a few days; and then use your eyes as well as your hoe. There is a young mullein comfortably established at the root of your rose bush."

"The mischievous thing!" said Lily. "Well, it shan't be

comfortable very long ;” and with a fierce grasp she seized hold of the mullein and pulled off a handful of leaves.

“Dear, dear !” said Lily ; “what shall I do now ?”

“Wait till the leaves grow again, and then take your trowel and weeding fork.”

“Why shouldn’t I take ’em at once ?” said Lily. “Why should I wait ?”

“Because now you have nothing to take hold of, and it would be harder work. Come, let’s go up and see what Clover is about.”

“O Clover is always weeding !” said Lily, as she followed Sam up the hill. “Her garden must be a great deal worse than mine.”

On the contrary, there was not a weed in it.

“Always weeding !” Sam repeated, with a smile, as he stood by the neat little patch of ground where Clover was tenderly watering her seedlings ; “always weeding,—that is the great secret of never having any weeds.”

“Well, I don’t think she has many flowers either,” said Lily. “Just see how many empty places—here—and here—and here. Two somethings in one place, and three somethings else in another place. There’s hardly a whole patch of anything.”

“How is that, Clover ?” said Sam, watching his sedate little sister, whose cheeks crimsoned in a moment. “I thought you had taken such pains with your flowers ?”

“Yes, I have tried to take a great deal of pains with them,” said Clover, looking very uncomfortable.

“Ah ! you see pains won’t do everything,” said Lily, triumphantly. “Now I just planted my flowers slap-dash, and my garden’s quite full.”

Sam whistled a little, thinking of the sorrel and mallows, of which also Lily's garden had been full.

"It looks to me," he said gravely, bending down to examine the little garden—"it looks to me as if the hedge had been encroaching here and there."

"The hedge!" said Lily. "I don't see any hedge."

"I thought I saw signs of it," said Sam, passing on to another place and scanning that. Clover looked at him anxiously. Did he really know what had become of her flowers? But Sam's face was imperturbable.

"What *do* you mean?" said Lily. "You're as good as a puzzle-book any day."

"What do I mean?" said Sam. "I was only alluding to one of the properties of matter—where one thing is another cannot be. So, of course, where the hedge creeps in the flowers must creep out."

"Well, I give it up," said Lily. "Why Clover, I thought you had ever so many of these—what do you call 'em?—and here's only three!"

"My balsams?" said Clover. "Oh, I'm glad you spoke of them! I wanted to ask Sam something, and I forgot all about it. Look here!" and Clover pushed aside the overhanging leaves of her three balsams, and showed a strange state of things. The ground was disturbed and turned up, lying in small hills and valleys; and right up from the highest hill stuck out a small brown paw, all furry and motionless.

"A cat!" cried Lily, darting forward.

"No, it's not a cat's paw," said Clover, "and I'm sure I don't know *what* it is, nor how it could get here among my balsams."

"It is a rabbit's paw," said Sam, looking close at it; "and what's more, the rabbit is here too."

"O has he hid away there to eat up my poor flowers?" said Clover, remembering that squirrels had a taste for abronias, and there was no telling what rabbits might like.

"Not he," said Sam, "he will never do any more mischief. That rabbit did not hide himself there."

"But who could have done it?" said Clover. "Not Jack?"

"It must have been Mat," said her brother. "I saw him with a young rabbit in his mouth yesterday; but he does not like raw meat, you know, and so did not eat it."

"What's the use of hiding it away, then?" said Lily.

"Ah, that I cannot tell. A dog generally seems to act upon the supposition that a famine *may* come some day; and in that case Mat probably thought he could eat raw meat."

"Funny old Mat!" said Clover, laughing. "But I wish he had buried his rabbit somewhere else! I don't want to touch it."

"Then I wouldn't touch it," said Sam. "The balsams will not be troubled, in fact they will rather like it."

"Like it!"

"Why, yes," said Sam; "they have not the least objection to raw meat, and have great appetites."

"There's another puzzle!" said Lily, despairingly.

"Not a bit; I mean what I say. Your balsams are great feeders, and will send their little roots to get many a rich meal from the rabbit."

"I don't like that at all," said Clover, with some disgust.

"It's what many plants will do, however," said Sam;

"though some are too delicate to relish quite such a hearty meal."

"Plants ought not to eat at all," said Lily,—*"little do-nothing things."*

"Do-nothing!" exclaimed Sam; "is it nothing to fill the world with beauty and fragrance; nothing to purify all the air for us to breathe; to furnish our clothing, to provide our fuel, our lights, our food?"

"Dear me, how you run on!" said Lily. "I don't know anything about that, Sam. What I say is, that they don't *work*—my flowers, I mean."

"Well, when you are half as busy as they are, I shall have great hopes of your turning out a useful woman," said her brother.

"Great hopes!" said Lily, scornfully. "I should think you'd better begin 'em right away then."

"But Sam," said Clover, "oh, won't you please tell us all about that? It sounds so interesting."

"Can't this afternoon," said Sam. "I promised Primrose that I would help her train her sweet peas. Where is the child all this time?"

"O she's singing to her garden; didn't you hear her?" said Lily.

"Singing to her garden!"

"Yes, and it's so funny. She does it every day, but she'll never let anybody get near her."

"It *is* funny," said Clover; "only it's so pretty, too. I think she tells mamma about every one of her flowers, and then I *think* mamma makes up little verses for her. And then Prim goes out and watches her flowers and sings the verses. But she'll never tell what they are."

"I'm bound to hear some of those verses," said Sam beginning to move softly along by the fence. "I shall creep up and listen."

"May we come too?" said Clover.

"If you'll not make the least noise."

So, very softly and slowly, moving on tip-toe, and not venturing to speak a word, they crept up the hill and round the house, coming at last to a corner very near Prim's little garden; and a pretty sight it was. The flowers were beginning to bloom quite freely—a white rose on the little rose-bush, and a scarlet blossom on the young geranium; with white tufts of alyssum, and green ones of mignonette. A splendid datura blossom held up its purple-tinted cup, and the rich fragrance of the sweet peas filled the air; while high above all mounted the ipomœa superba, stretching across on wires even to the railing that crowned the bow-window, and bearing two or three flowers of the most exquisite blue. In front of all these beauties, her little hands clasped tight together, her little face grave with intense enjoyment, stood Primrose—now looking at one treasure, now at another. But most of all her eyes watched the ipomœa, mounting ever upward towards the sky, its own blossoms almost rivalling the summer blue. Then all at once she began to sing, but never turning her eyes from the beautiful vine; singing softly to herself, so that the silent listeners could but just catch the words:—

"Climb, climb a little way,
Follow Jesus every day;
Holding fast his precious hand,
Mount at last where angels stand.
Little creeper, weak and small,
He is strong enough for all;

In his tender love and care
Fresh, pure blossoms daily bear.
All your beauty is from him ;
Let him train and let him trim :
Hide the sun, or bid it shine—
Still climb higher, little vine ! ”

And Prim stooped down for a sprig of mignonette and one of sweet alyssum, and carried them off into the house for “mamma.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

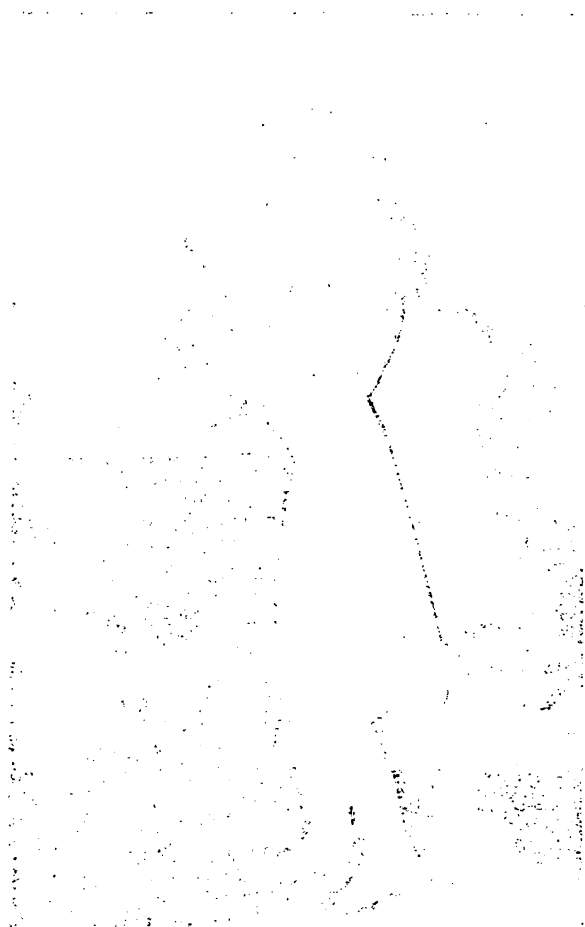
It was now the children's business to provide fresh flowers every day for the household. Mrs May had a certain dainty little basket with a glass dish inside, of just a pretty size, and this was to be always filled for the breakfast table. The children took it in turn ; and their father said that so long as they made the basket a true sweet ornament, he would take care that they did not want for plants and seeds. Then there were other baskets and vases needing attention : one on Mrs May's work-table, and one in a niche in the hall, and one in Mr May's study. Sam, too, had a stem-glass in his room ; and Jack gave notice that he had a cracked tea-cup, but nobody paid any attention to that. The children took turns with all the others, in regular order ; so that Mr May would say,

"Who has my study table to-day ? Prim ? Well don't come in there before eleven o'clock, my dear, for I shall be very busy."

After the work was done, indeed, it was easy to tell whose day it was at any particular basket : the flowers were so different, and the styles of arrangement so *very* unlike,—all which amused Mr May very much.

"True to their characters !" he would say, surveying the breakfast table. "Ah Lily, it is your day here, I see."

"Papa, how did you know ? Did you remember that my day always comes next after Clover's ?"





"Prim dreamed over her flowers."—P. 181.

"Not I!" said her father, laughing—"in fact, I thought it generally came *before*! But they say a workman is known by his chips, Lily,—there's no mistaking the handiwork."

Yes, it was very true to character, indeed; glowing pinks and flaming petunias flung into the basket from a full hand,—a careless wealth of blossoms that yet grouped themselves somehow in a not ungraceful fashion, as flowers will do if they are only let alone; while over all shot up two or three tall stems of canna blooms, rich, tropical, and strange looking, among the every-day-at-home beauties. The petunias might hang over more on one side than the other; the cannas might all face to the south or to the north, Lily troubled not her head about such trifles; and yet the whole effect was sure to be rich and attractive.

Clover's pyramids of bloom, on the contrary, were always entirely symmetrical. Not stiffly fashioned by line and rule, clipped in like the old time yew trees, but there was always a certain balance of power among her floral beauties. If a white stock rose up, stately and sweet, on the side of the basket next Mrs May, there was pretty sure to be a crimson or a purple one to greet Mr May's eyes on the other side. If the pretty canary vine went climbing about over the heads of its neighbours, it was never allowed to be in the least sprawling or obtrusive; and even the gay cockscombs had to acknowledge the fact, that there were other glories in the world besides their own.

Prim dreamed over her flowers, and spent more time in the choice and placing of their various shapes and colours than most people give to the assorting of a dinner party. For what if the noble datura should put out of countenance the delicate sweet pea? or if the fair, modest pansies should feel themselves overshadowed by the ipomoea superba, which,

starting from the same soil with themselves, had mounted up and up towards the very sky, while their home was still on the ground? A rose, indeed, was at home everywhere, but would everything feel at home with the rose? Might not her queenly grace be too much for some of the lesser beauties?

With a feeling something like this, if not put in words, did Prim bend over her baskets and vases; and not a flower of *her* arranging had ever cause to say to its next neighbour, (as I once heard a Frenchwoman say at a party,) "You are killing my dress!"

So the very first thing every fair morning, early, early—before other people were well awake—the children took their own little scissors and baskets, and went down to the garden to pick the flowers before the dew was off; for then they would keep fresh so much the longer, and the breakfast dish at least must be ready by breakfast time. And Sam taught them how to pick flowers neatly,—not pulling out the whole centre of a tuft of bloom, as I have had done in my garden; but choosing a blossom here and there, underneath, or at the outside, cutting it trimly off; so that the bush or plant never lost its beauty, but was all the better for the sweets it gave away.

"Mamma," said Prim, "it does really seem as if the more flowers we picked, the more there were left."

"I should think you'd give a few away then occasionally," said Jack. "I should despise to be so stingy with flowers."

"Stingy!" said Lily, "who's stingy?"

"It's not delicate to mention names," said Jack, "but I know of one poor boy who was refused some, for certain."

"Mamma!" said Primrose, leaning her small elbows on her mother's lap, and looking eagerly up, "he wanted *two yards* of my ipomœa to tie to the tail of his kite! Two yards, mamma!"

"Then I should say the poor boy was quite unreasonable," said Mrs May. "The ipomœa is much better where it is."

"But in the cause of science," said Jack, "one should spare something. The blue flowers would have marked the course of the wind so finely. And nobody ever sent up such a tail before."

"I believe nobody ever did!" said his mother laughing.

"It's all very well to laugh, ma'am," said Jack, with the virtuous air of a young philanthropist; "but if there aren't loads and loads of people wanting these girls' flowers, then my name is *not* Jack Robinson,"—with which surprising statement Jack took himself off.

"Mamma," said Lily, "do you think that's really true, about loads of people wanting our flowers?"

"That would give us rather a strange set of neighbours! No, I think many people want flowers,—not yours, in particular."

"O mamma, who?" said Clover.

"Poor people, and sick people, and prisoners."

"Prisoners!—do they like flowers?" said Lily, "I thought prisoners were bad people."

"Bad people are not all badness," said Mrs May. "There was a lady once in India who had very little children to keep her at home, and so could not go about among the prisons and hospitals, bearing comfort, as she would have

liked to do. Then she thought she might *send* comfort. So every Saturday she made up a quantity of beautiful bouquets, fastening in among the leaves of each some sweet Bible word of counsel or promise or hope; and on Sunday her husband took them to the prison. At first the men would have nothing to say to him, thinking that he was hired to come; but when they found that only love had brought him, they were ready for anything at his hands. Other people laughed at the lady for her Saturday's work, but the prisoners wept over their flowers."

"That was lovely!" said Lily. "But we haven't got any prison here."

"Mamma," said Clover, "there's a beautiful story about that—about bad people liking flowers—on the cover of Mr Vick's catalogue. There's somebody off in Kansas, mamma, who got seeds from Mr Vick during the war, and so had her garden full of splendid asters and pinks and petunias, like ours. Well, when Quantrell came along with his men, making that terrible raid you told us of, mamma, he came to this very place to burn it up. And when he saw all the flowers, Quantrell said the place was too pretty to burn,—and so the men all went away, and never touched a thing."

"But we don't have raids here either," said Primrose, looking as grave as if the fact were quite to be regretted; "so *our* flowers can never be of any great use, mamma; and nobody can want them—for all Jack says."

"I want them, you know, every day," said Mrs May, kissing the earnest little face. "And for the rest, this is the rule, with flowers as with everything else: 'As ye have *opportunity*, do good unto all men.' Keep that in mind, and see if the opportunity does not come. God never gives

us things for nothing, and not often, I think, merely for ourselves."

"Then *I* think," said Lily, "that we had better take the very first opportunity, and go and see Mrs De Peyster. She wanted to see our flowers, and she was so kind when I got in the mud. And we could carry her a great bunch."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"MAMMA," said Primrose, "when the little shoot has got up into the air, and the little root has got down into the earth, then what next? How does my ipomœa keep on growing?"

"In just the very same way that it began," said her mother, "sending out more and more roots into the soft earth, and more and more stem into the sunshine; and as fast as the stem grows, it keeps pushing out leaf after leaf."

"And what do the leaves do?" said Primrose.

"The leaves unfold and grow for a little, till they have got their full size, and then they go to work. For there are no idle hands in all nature's broad kingdom, and the leaves have a great deal to do. They have to take in food from the air, and they have to prepare the food which the little roots gather from the earth."

"Cook it up, I suppose, in the sunshine," said Lily; "mamma, you do say the funniest things!"

"But I want to know how the leaves do it," said Clover. "How can they take in anything from the air? and what do they take?"

"The plant," said Mrs May, "gets its living in two ways; but it lives only on mineral things. The roots take up moisture from the soil, and this moisture has always in it a certain amount of earthy matter; the leaves on their part take in both water and air: this is called the crude sap,—not at all fit for food for the plant. It must first be digested."

"Digested!" said Lily. "Do you mean that my petunias have a stomach, mamma?"

"Not at all,—that is found only in animals. Plants do all their eating and digestion on the surface. The crude sap is carried along the tiny rootlets to the main roots, and along these to the stem; and then up the stem and through every little branch and twig to the leaves. Then the leaves digest it,—assimilate it,—spreading it out in the sun and air until part of the moisture is evaporated, or drawn off, while the earthy matter remains, and becomes part of the substance of the plant, being changed from mineral to vegetable matter."

"But then the leaves have it all to themselves," said Primrose.

"Not so; this new vegetable matter, dissolved in the leaf sap, forms a thin mucilage,—it is the prepared sap—the very stuff of which each new bit of the plant is made; and it is then distributed over the whole plant, just as and just where it is wanted."

"Mamma," said Clover, "it's the Arabian Nights in flowers! How does the sap go over the plant? what takes it?"

"Every part of every plant," said Mrs May, "is made up of little separate cells, divided from each other by thin membranous partitions. There are millions of these in a single plant; you cannot begin to count them; and they are far too small to be seen by the naked eye. Up through these little cells and partitions the crude sap from the roots ascends to the leaves; and the leaves are perfectly full of little breathing holes—little mouths which admit the air."

"My thick canna leaves?" said Lily.

"Yes, the thick kinds as well as the thin, all must breathe."

"But I don't understand how the sap gets up, yet," said Clover.

"I think nobody understands it," said Mrs May, "whether the little partitions open like doors to let the sap pass through, or how it is, we know not. Some people have supposed this was the way : some have asserted that not all the power of hydraulic pressure can force water through a piece of wood the reverse way, towards the end that was next the root ; while to do it in the other direction was quite easy."

"But then how does the prepared sap get up and down and round about ?" said Lily.

"It used to be said," answered Mrs May, "that the crude sap had its own special channels, and the prepared sap its own too ; so that they went up and down, as you say Lily, and never interfered with each other. This they certainly do : but some people now deny the separate channels, and how the truth is I do not know."

"Well, mamma, why did Sam tell us not to pour water close round the stem of the plant, but always a little way off ?" said Clover.

"Because it is the little, little roots which take in the moisture, and they are the furthest off from the stem. As the older roots harden, the plant pushes out new rootlets from the end of these, with a young, tender surface and tip, which absorbs more readily. The larger the plant, the more distant its little drinking roots will be."

"So all plants do is to eat and grow," said Lily.

"That is their way of life, as it is yours," said Mrs May "but the real amount of work they do neither you nor I can reckon up."

"Work !" Lily repeated,

"Mamma," said Primrose, "I thought my flowers were just happy all day long."

"Idleness is not my idea of happiness, you know," said her mother, smiling. "And in one way or another plants make all we eat and all we wear."

"I remember Sam told us something about that one day," said Clover; "and I wanted to know more."

"Well, they don't make *all* we wear," said Lily, "for there's Maria Jarvis's silk dress. Silk worms made that."

"And what fed the silk worms?"

"Why—leaves, I suppose," said Lily.

"So we get our woollen dresses from the sheep's back, but the sheep has been living on grass. Directly or indirectly, almost everything that we use comes from plants, or with their help. Of some we eat the leaves, of some the flowers, of some the seeds, of some the roots, and of some the stems."

"There's potatoes for roots, and beans and corn for seeds" said Lily.

"And there are cauliflower and spinach for flowers and leaves," said Clover. "But I don't remember any stems."

"You remember celery?" said Mrs May,— "and cardoons, and asparagus, and rhubarb; and sugar comes from the stalks of the sugar cane. Then all the animals that we eat are fed by plants; and much of our clothing comes directly from them. Then building stuff, and ship timber, and tool handles, and machine frames, and many of our medicines, and all our fuel."

"But mamma," said Primrose, "don't a great many people burn coal?"

"And coal was once wood. Wood that grew upon the

earth ages ago, in the time when plants reigned in the world."

"When plants reigned!" said Lily.

"Mamma," said Clover, "I don't understand one bit!"

"I mean, when of all things in the world plants were of the greatest size and in the highest glory. Each race of creation has seemed to have its special time of grandeur; the fishes, the reptiles, the quadrupeds, the plants; and it was during the reign of plants that the material for most of our coal beds grew. Then there were club mosses seventy feet high, and tree ferns, mere bits of which were forty feet long; and reeds rising like masts along the water's edge. Not merely your flowers, and our shade trees, and the fresh grass spring out of the earth at the Lord's command. 'Lo, these are parts of his ways; but how little a portion is heard of him!'"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was not hard to find an opportunity to go to Mrs De Peyster's, even when the carriage was going in other directions. Roger often wanted sand or mould, or something else, for his gardening operations, and as he was just about as steady as Meteor, the children always had a safe escort, even when Sam was too busy to attend them. Roger and Meteor, and the old wagon, and the three children, made a pleasant party to look at this summer afternoon as they jogged along the road towards the little lake. But such bunches of flowers as went too had not often been seen in that wagon before. Such zinnias, and asters, and pinks, and pansies, and petunias! Mrs De Peyster fairly laughed as she surveyed them from the house door.

"Guess you brought half the garden to show what 'tother half's like," she said. "Well, I declare they're handsome! What's this? You don't mean to say you've got a double youth-and-old-age of *that* size?—why, it's every bit as fine as a daly. And here's johnny-jump-ups as big as your two eyes. And what's this? Lady slippers, as I'm a sinful woman! Turned fashionable, too, I guess; got rosettes to 'em bigger 'n the shoes."

Somewhat scandalised to hear her beloved pansies called johnny-jump-ups, Prim's eyes were indeed pretty wide open; while Clover was no less amazed to hear the beautiful bal-

sams pronounced "fashionable." But the name for the zinnias was the strangest of all.

"What do you call them youth-and-old-age for, Mrs De Peyster?" she said.

"'Cause it's their name, I s'pose," said Mrs De Peyster promptly. "I didn't give it to 'em. But it fits 'em to a T. There's the little child, and the baby, and the father, and the old grandmother, all on one bush. And the little ones grow up, and the old ones turn brown. Just you look when you go home, and you'll see. But it's real handsome o' you to fetch 'em here for me; I've heard tell o' these new notions o' flowers, and didn't more 'n half believe it."

"Why, it was only pleasure to pick 'em," said Clover. "And we've got a great many."

"And mamma says God almost never gives us anything merely for ourselves," said Prim—"not even our flowers."

"What for, then?" said Mrs De Peyster, pausing with both hands full of flowers to look at Prim. And Prim at once went on to tell her "what for," giving not only Mrs May's own words on the subject, but also the stories of Quantrell and the lady in Calcutta; to all of which Mrs De Peyster listened with great interest.

"Live and learn," she said. "I knew something of all this before, but not quite so much, I guess. Now don't you want to see *my* flowers?"

"Why, I didn't know you had any," said Lily; while Clover exclaimed—

"Oh please, mayn't I have the baby a little while? I'll be ever so careful."

But the baby was asleep just then, so they all went out to the garden, which indeed was gay enough; but the bright blossoms would have looked to the eyes of Mr Stubbs much

as last year's bonnet to those of his mistress. For there were tall marigolds, and blue love-in-a-puzzle, and live-for-ever, and red balm, and yellow southern-wood, and spiderwort—whose blue eyes are banished from all good society; and great sunflowers, whose full golden faces shone out above everything else, and would certainly have made any fuchsia run for its life. "Matrimony" twined about the fence, and strange green and yellow gourds hung basking in the sun. All was gay and common in Mrs De Peyster's garden, though the hydrangeas were certainly as fine as could be seen, and the monthly rose was as indefatigable in its blooming duties as if there had been the least hope it could ever be recognised for even the fourth cousin of "Marechal Niel." There was a sweet apple geranium too, and a rose geranium of tall stature, and a lemon-scented verbena, and a bush of brilliant high cranberries, and white feverfew, and a corner full of yellow tansy.

"Now, don't you want some slips?" said the hostess, breaking off bits of her geraniums. "You haven't got anything smells much sweeter than that."

"Oh we'd like them *very* much," said Clover.

"But you oughtn't to break 'em off—you should cut them," said Lily.

"Should I?—well maybe I should," said Mrs De Peyster with a laugh; "but if you want to bend trees, child, you've got to take 'em while they're saplings. And I guess my plants wouldn't think it was me if I did anything *but* break 'em."

"Do you pick them so often?" said Lily; "why, I didn't see any in the house."

"O I didn't mean for myself," said Mrs De Peyster, "but there's all the time somebody wanting 'em. The

school children, *they* come; and the sick people, *they* send; and the beggars, *they* look; there's always hands ready for flowers."

Clover and Lily thought over this statement of facts, while Primrose started off on a quest after something at the other end of the garden.

"Bees! bees!" she cried; "only look! But what idle bees! What makes them stand all about so?" For the bees had poured out of their hive, and covered the front of it with a thick dark curtain.

"It's hot, and they're hot," said Mrs De Peyster. "But they may just as well go to work—I ain't a-going to let 'em swarm this time of year.

'A swarm in May
Is worth a load of hay.
A swarm in June
Isn't worth a spoon.
A swarm in July,—
Let 'em fly!'"

The children laughed and clapped their hands.

"But this isn't July," said Prim; "this is August."

"Yes," said Mrs De Peyster, "and

'A swarm in *Au-gust*
Feed you must.'"

"Oh, I like that!" said Lily. "And what do you do in September, Mrs De Peyster?"

Then their hostess answered gravely—

"'A swarm in September,
I don't remember!'"

Gleefully talking and laughing, the children ran up and down the garden walks, while Mrs De Peyster went in to fetch the baby, whose small voice now made itself heard;

and then there was great strife (of a gentle kind) as to who should have her the most ; and baby had almost as many attendants as a young prince. Then they all went into the house to eat fresh bread and butter, and wild blackberries, and milk ; and then Meteor came slowly up to the door with his load of sand, and as slowly trotted away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I REALLY think," said Mr May one morning at the breakfast table, "that you children have done wonders with your three dollars. Why, the gardens are splendid!"

"Yes, indeed," said Lily, "I think they are. If it wasn't for two or three things gardening would be too delightful."

"What are the two or three things, pray?"

"One is the weeds, papa."

"Aha!" said her father, laughing; "I thought you did not mean to have any weeds?"

Lily shook her head with an air that said very plainly if *she* had not meant it the weeds had.

"It's so hard to rake 'em off, papa. I hoe them up ever so nicely, but the minute I begin to rake, away comes the earth and everything, as if I was going to take off the whole garden."

"How do you hold your rake?" asked Mr May.

"I don't know, papa. In both hands."

"Yes, of course. But is the end of the handle high or low?"

"Pretty low, I guess," said Lily.

"Hold it high next time," said her father. "When you rake a bed after digging, and have to level it here and there, the handle must sometimes be held low; but when you are raking off weeds you can hardly hold it too upright; then the earth sifts through the teeth of the rake, and only the

weeds are drawn off. What's the other hindrance to the perfect felicity of gardening?"

"My clothes!" said Lily, with such a pitiful intonation that everybody laughed in the most unsympathetic manner.

"You may believe that, papa," said Jack. "If you don't, just ask Malvina."

"I will when I desire any of Malvina's conversation," said Mr May, who had the greatest possible dislike to hearing the kitchen quoted for anything. "What's the matter with the clothes, Lily? They will get muddy, just as the weeds will grow?"

"Oh, papa, muddy don't express it!" said Lily, despairingly.

"Well, keep up your courage, my dear," said her father, laughing. "I am much inclined to fear that you will see little more mud this summer; it seems like the beginning of a dry time. Clover, I have seen no balsams so fine as yours anywhere, except at that little house of Nobody's by the hill road. I can't imagine where they got them."

"But oh, papa!" cried Primrose; "have you seen my heart's-ease?"

"Your heart's-ease?" said her father, lifting her up in his arms; "why, you are heart's-ease yourself! If you can shew me any better I should like to see it."

Prim pulled him away out of the room, followed by Lily and Clover, the one talking eagerly about her own flowers, the other in a happy muse, thinking of the beautiful balsams of little Dick Nobody.

Mr May was right—a dry time set in; and Lily soon began to wish for the mud again, with all its troublesome qualities. The soil in the little gardens lost its rich brown hue, and looked hot and dusty; while the poor flowers hung

their heads in the pitiless sunshine, and cried for rain. Lily would fain have watered them at all hours of the day, but Sam assured her that that was the very way to kill them.

"Wait till the shady hours come," he said, "and then water thoroughly. And do not begin watering at all unless you are sure your patience will hold out."

"Mine will—till the cistern fails," said Lily. "But why do you say that?"

"Because a little watering only cakes the earth round the plants, and makes matters worse than ever," said Sam. "Keep the earth as loose and soft round your plants as ever you can in dry weather."

"That's odd," said Lily. "I should think it would just let the heat in."

"It lets the air in, but the air brings moisture with it. And it leaves the roots at liberty to go everywhere in search of all the ground may contain."

"Ah, I think the ground must contain very little just now!" said Clover. "It seems as if all the water I put on my plants at night was just drunk up by the rest of the earth before morning."

It did seem so, indeed. However, the children took good care of their corner of sweet herbs in that dry time; and Mr May ordered Robin to draw and carry to the little gardens as much water as their owners would put on; so you may be certain the three watering-pots were not idle. Lily, to be sure, made a good deal of splashing with hers, and sometimes had more mud, for awhile, than she cared for,—the holes in the rose of her watering-pot were so large. Often, too, she quite washed away the earth from some of her flower roots, and had to coax it back carefully with her trowel,—though still the plants took thankfully even too

much of a good thing. But Clover's garden at sundown, when she had done watering for the night, looked as if there had been a gentle, thorough shower from the clouds; for with her long-nosed watering-pot she could reach even the tops of her plants: now and then Sam borrowed it to give Prim's tall flowers a shower bath. But both plants and children were very glad when the weather changed and there came a rain. And how the plants grew then! how the blossoms opened, one kind after another! Prim's heart's-ease were the loveliest things that could be, and of ever so many kinds; and though just in the heat of the weather (for heart's-ease does not bear the sun) the flowers were rather small, yet as the cool days came on they grew larger and larger, till they were a wonder to look at. There was the King of the Blacks—a great black purple pansy with a small yellow eye; and another pansy that was bright yellow, and another that was pale yellow, and another that was yellow, with crimson marks. Another was all royal purple, and another purple and gold, and another purple and blue, and another crimson and white. Almost every plant as it came into bloom seemed to be of new colours or markings; and Prim would come running into the breakfast room with a breathless—

“Oh, mamma, there's *another* heart's-ease out! Won't you just come and see it?”

Then when the snow white *cœnothra* began to open its large flowers every evening, there was no end to the joy. Jack declared Prim's eyes grew as big as her primrose blossoms.

Clover, too, could boast of beauties; the balsams, with spotted blossoms, as double as any rose; and tall showy zinnias; and the rich crimson tassels, 'drooping till they touched the ground, of love-lies-bleeding. Stocks promised

to make a fine show by and by ; and the fence, quite covered with hyacinth beans and canary-bird vine, looked almost like a green bank, spotted with purple and yellow.

Lily's garden was, to say truth, a little wild : things had been planted without much thought about such trifles as colour and height, and some of her flowers had reason to think themselves badly treated. For instance, the little dwarf convolvulus was planted so far back in the bed that, without stepping in among the plants, it was hard to see its delicate trailing colours. On the other hand, the hollyhocks were so near the front that their broad and somewhat coarse green leaves stretched out even across the walk. Petunias were everywhere,—Lily had set them out wherever she could find a bit of room—and they roamed hither and thither, ran over the delicate little scarlet flax, (which was a real beauty,) and climbed quite over the head of Lily's small rose bush. But then they did furnish a great many flowers,—pink, and purple, and white-throated, and white-edged. Lily was loud in her praises, and in fact seemed to have almost adopted Mr Jarvis's maxim of "Quantity—quantity,"—and actually said that the flax was pretty—what there was of it. The hollyhocks were not in bloom yet, and the asters were mere green tufts ; but the pinks were exquisite, and the canna spread out its broad pale leaves with quite the air of a distinguished foreigner.

"The three gardens are as like the three children as possible !" Mr May declared.

"How ?" said his wife, smiling.

Excellent, brilliant, and poetical," said Mr May.

"I am sure Clover's is brilliant too," said Mrs May.

"Yes, but in a way so perfectly orderly and neat that the v-like qualities strike you first. Look at Lily's petunias,

running wild, after a most brilliant fashion ! And there's my little Prim dreaming over her pansies ! This gardening is a great business."

Nothing had been heard of little Dick Nobody's garden for some time, and though Clover had been very anxious to see it, she had not dared to say a word. But one day, after the dry weather had passed by and the showers had come to make everything fresh, Sam proposed they should take a walk that way and see Dick's balsams.

"We'll see if they look like yours, Clover," he said.

"Has Dick got any heart's-ease, Sam ?" said little Primrose.

"I think not."

"Then I'd better take him some," said Prim, with a very grave face.

"But you'll kill the plants dear, if you take them up now, when they are all full of flowers," said Clover ; "or at least kill the flowers."

"It's only the flowers I mean to take," replied Primrose, as gravely as before. "I'll take Dick a bunch of 'em."

"What's that for ?" said Sam, putting his hands under her chin, and bringing the little sober face into view.

"Because," said Prim, "I've been thinking about it a great deal—about what mamma said. And if God asked me what I had done with my heart's-ease I shouldn't like to say I'd never given Dick one."

"Oh, if that's all," said Lily, "I can pick him a great bunch of petunias. Do 'em good too—they want cutting."

While Lily flew down to her garden and began to pull off the petunias with an unsparing hand, Primrose crouched down by her patch of heart's-ease, carefully culling one of each shade and tint that she could find, putting them

CHAPTER XXX.

Clover's Journal, August 18.—"I don't suppose anybody would believe how worried I was this morning—for of course grown-up people aren't so silly about little things ; but just for the time, you know, it was a real great thing to me. I suppose when people are little, things seem big ; and then when people grow big, things seem little. It's all *relative*, as papa says.

"Well, I went down to my dear garden very, very early, when the birds were singing just as hard as they could, and I sang too. I knew my garden would look lovely, for I had hoed and raked it all quite smooth yesterday ; and when I do that the flowers all seem to understand about it, and begin to grow at once faster than ever. There was a new aster coming out too, a blue one, so I ran down ; and there that mischievous Jack had been, trying to spoil everything—I mean he had nearly done it, for he couldn't have *tried*—and he had run all over my smooth garden, and he'd tied the flowers all up with long pieces of twine,—not each bunch by itself, but an aster pulled across to meet a pink, and a zinnia and martynia tied together ; and my beautiful love-lies-bleeding was looped clear up and tied to the fence ! But then I needn't talk about Jack, for I did what was worse than all—I jumped right over my hedge, and got angry in a minute. And at first I thought Jack had pulled up all my sweet herbs too ; but at last I found one little leaf of patience

in a corner,—I suppose God shewed it to me, as he did the well to Hagar,—and then there was more and more, until by and by I found some perseverance too. Then I went to work. But it took me a long time to untie all the strings and set the poor things straight again ; and I haven't raked the bed smooth yet, for the dressing-bell rang, and it was my day for the breakfast flowers, so I had to make haste. And since breakfast mamma's been telling us about that verse : 'Add to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.' Such beautiful things about charity ! 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind.' Some people, mamma says, suffer long and are *cross*—but charity is kind. And charity endureth all things, and *thinketh no evil* ; so I must not suppose Jack really knew what mischief he was doing, or meant to break my new aster. For *that* was broken. But charity never faileth. If Jack breaks 'em all some day, I must remember that. And this afternoon, maybe, I can get it all raked smooth again, and there's another bud coming on the aster. I haven't said a word to Jack."

Jack's Journal, August 18.—"Girls are such queer things ! I'm glad I'm not a girl, to begin with ; but they're nice to tease. Only Clover—*she* makes one come off second best. It isn't every man's got such a sister as that, though, I can tell you.

"Now it's not good for people to have the world go too smooth with 'em : our minister says so, and he ought to know. Nor their gardens neither, by the same rule : so I thought I'd just try and find out what sort of cloth Clover's got for a temper. I never *did* find out yet ; but if anything *could* fray it out, it would be her garden. Clover loves that garden like her two eyes. So I took a turn down there this

morning ever so early ; dressed up the place a little, made the flowers look a trifle more affectionate than common, and put rather a new air upon things ; and then I went off with papa to ride, and didn't see old Clo till breakfast. Tell you ! I felt streaked then !—why, the girl had been crying her eyes out, and didn't dare look at anybody. And the way she gave me all the best cakes, and everything else she could get, just spoiled my breakfast,—and no sort of mistake.

“ Well, after breakfast the girls generally read to mamma—which is probably good for them, being girls—and I thought now was Clo's time for talking, if she was going to talk. And as there'd be nobody to tell me, maybe, just what she said, and as it was quite important that I should know every word,—just for the interests of science I rolled myself up in the window curtain. And I suppose I should have gone to sleep there as like as not, (for Clo never said one word about me,) if mamma hadn't just chosen the chapter she did. I can't think what possessed her, I'm sure, but I know I wished myself anywhere else. How she did talk ! and how Clo listened ! Lily was flinging herself about as usual—*isn't she* easy teased !—but Clo never stirred. She just eat up mamma's words, and drank 'em down, for I could see her quite plain through the curtain. And then Lily broke out in her wild way :—‘ Mamma, I can't think what stuff such people are made of ? ’

“ ‘ It's not silk,’ said mamma ; ‘ for that will fray and will not wash ; and it's not woollen, for that will shrink and scorch : but it is linen—strong and even and white : for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.’ And then Clover just dropped her head on mamma's lap, and sobbed as Prim does sometimes ; and I let science take care of itself, and jumped right down out of the window, and

landed in a rose bush, and scratched the very handsomest part of my nose. But I think if Clover's going to add charity to her brotherly kindness, I'd better see about adding brotherly kindness to my— anything I happen to have! And if she shan't have the sweetest rose-geranium that can be bought for money, my name is *certainly* not Jack Robinson. No, I give it up about Clover,—but there's Lily yet, and Prim,—and I *rather* guess they'll last me some time."

"In the pursuit of science," as he said, Jack's restless brain presently wrought out another plan; and the next day he presented himself in the sitting-room with a somewhat novel request.

"Mamma, I want Prim for the whole afternoon,—and nobody's to ask where or wherefore."

"I fear you will find it a difficult matter to get Prim then," said Mrs May, with a very doubtful shake of the head. "It seems to be about as much as you can manage, for a whole afternoon, to take care of yourself."

"No but, mamma," said Jack, perching himself on a chair in a way to distract anybody with weak nerves, "this is really important."

"More important than Prim?"

"You don't suppose I wouldn't take good care of *her*?" said Jack indignantly. "My dear ma'am, what can you be thinking of? Well—let's have the barouche then, and Hannibal—if you're afraid of me and the buggy."

"My dear Jack," said his mother, "do you know in what fashion you put words together?"

"Then we can all go," said Lily, "in the barouche."

"No, you can't," said Jack. "I'll have no one but Prim. And now I'll run and tell Hannibal."

And as Hannibal could be absolutely trusted, Mrs May made no further objection ; and in high glee, as well as great state, Prim took her place on the back seat of the pretty carriage, and Jack sprang in after, leaving Lily in something of a state of mind on the steps at the front door.

"I think it's just mean!" she said,—“and not even to tell where they were going! Mamma, why do you let Jack do so? I don't see why it should be Prim instead of anybody else, I'm sure. And we might all have gone.”

“Well, never mind,” said the gentle Clover, smothering a sigh, as she looked after the barouche on its golden way. “I'll tell you what we'll do, Lily,” she added, brightening up, “we'll try to do something for somebody!—mamma says that's the very best cure for a disappointment.”

“I don't want to——,” was Lily's short reply. “I'd rather have somebody do something for me.”

“Well, I'll be that somebody, then, if you'll tell me what to do,” said Clover laughing. “I'll be somebody for you, and you'll be somebody to me.”

“I do think you are the best-natured girl I ever saw in my life,” said Lily, her face relaxing. “But it's so mean! There, they're out of out sight now, so let's go and take some flowers to old James Tucker.”

“And we might pick a bunch for the Green children too,” said Clover. “How good it is we've found out that everybody wants flowers.”

Yes, everybody wanted flowers: the old man that was sick, and the woman that was sad, and the poor children who had nothing pretty of their own. And Clover and Lily found out that it was really true, that nothing made flowers grow like picking them. The little gardens were gay with bloom ;

and it was a constant pleasure to carry baskets of their beauties to the scattered houses along the road, or in the valley, or on the hill. When the person "who wanted flowers" lived far away, Sam went too—or Mrs May, or one of the servants ; and the little baskets and their young owners came to be as well known in the neighbourhood as the very church steeple itself.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CLOVER and Lily went alone this time—this particular day in August ; and they had been to several houses, scattering sweetness by the way, and now with empty baskets were walking gently home in the level sunbeams. Then on a sudden, with a great clatter of hoofs and cloud of dust, the Jarvis carriage came whirling up, and stopped at their very side.

“O here you are !—jump in !” cried Miss Maria,—“there ’s nobody here but me, and I ’ll take you home. And we ’ll go to our house first,—your mother said you might, for I asked her, I ’ve just been there.

Clover and Lily needed little pressing to accept such a pleasant invitation, and in a minute more they were all whirling off together to Chestnut Hill.

“You can leave your baskets in the carriage, you know,” said Miss Maria kindly ; “and then they ’ll be all ready when you want to go home. Mamma don’t like baskets in the hall. Where have you been ?—I ’m so glad to see you.”

It was like another world now. Two little girls on foot, trudging along to carry pinks and petunias to a poor old sick man in a house with one room ; and two little girls wheeling up the grand avenue of Chestnut Hill in a green and gold carriage, were such very different things !

And the avenue *was* grand, with great old chestnut trees

flinging their arms out through the golden light, and beneath lay the soft green turf, flecked with sunbeams. Everything was in green and gold that afternoon. Other beautiful trees came in sight as the prospect opened—a copper beech, and a weeping ash, and a birch with its stem of silver, and beds and spots and bushes of rare flowers—rustic baskets and vases of gay blossoms, and rustic seats where one might tarry and look at all the rest. Fuchsias were in great profusion around the door, and the delicate musk plant shewed its yellow bells on the piazza, and blue lobelias hung trailing from beds of ivy and fern.

“I’ll tell mamma I met you out walking,” whispered Maria to her friends, “and that will account for your having on calico dresses. Mamma said this morning that the dust spoiled everything; and I’ll shew you my new silk.”

“And can we see the flowers too?” said Clover.

“La, yes—of course, if you want to! I never saw such girls as you are for flowers. We’ll go there first if you like, before I take my veil off. I have to wear it all the time, because I freckle so; and I don’t know *what* mamma would do if I should get freckled.”

So passing by the open door of the drawing-room, where sat a party of gay ladies, Maria led her friends through the tea-room, where the table stood in a great glitter of gold and silver, with dishes of luscious sweetmeats and baskets of rich cake.

“Have some?” said Maria, helping herself the while, and speaking with her mouth full. “Tea won’t be ready this age, and *I’m* starved.”

But Clover and Lily both declined.

“Well, you’ll be sorry, that’s all,” said Maria. “Tea’s

always so late. Come—if we're quick we'll catch William before he goes to *his* tea, and make him shew us all the things." And opening a glass door, Maria led her friends down a flight of side steps to another part of the lawn, which showed a distant view, not only of the greenhouses, but also of the head gardener himself.

Mr Stubbs proved to be in a most obliging mood,—the world had gone well with him that day. And now, just finishing his evening inspection of the hot-houses and so forth, he had found certain rare cuttings striking root as if they were common things, and certain other costly plants coming fast into bloom ; and thus pride and skill being both in a gratified state,—his tea also being not quite ready,—Mr Stubbs was willing to turn back with the children, and once more open the doors of the charmed tropical life within his care. Neither was it in any true gardener's heart to help being pleased with the reverent admiration of Clover and Lily ; even though it was shown about many things which were familiar enough to other eyes. But when they stood speechless before a range of glowing gloxinias, or touched with softest little fingers the stiff leaves of his yuccas, and the delicate tracery of his priceless ferns ; Mr Stubbs smiled quietly to himself, and repeated his first opinion, that they were very nice young people indeed, and had some sense. Quite different from Miss Maria, who always ran her nose against the yuccas, and stuck her fingers into the bells of the gloxinias, and pulled off the fern leaves to make green feathers to her doll's hat. Mr Stubbs was touched. He led the children at last into a house just filled with cuttings and young plants of all sorts ; and choosing out two small pots wherein were growing two delicious scented lemon verbenas,

he put them—and a whole weight of delight—into the hands of Clover and Lily. Perfectly happy they left the greenhouse, and perfectly happy—when at last tea was over—they drove home through the starlight, the two little precious plants carefully held in both hands.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JACK and Primrose, meanwhile, had driven off in the very lap of the sunbeams, and the slight touch of mystery about the expedition was just the finishing touch to Prim's pleasure. But when they were fairly out on the high-road, away from all curious eyes and ears, and with the steady trot, trot, of the horses' feet ringing out sharply upon the still air, and bringing the carriage every moment nearer to some delightful goal of pleasure; then Prim thought it was time to have the mystery unfolded.

"Jack, where are we going?" she said, as softly as if the popular theory about "little birds" were true.

"We are going," Jack replied, "to see Scipio Africanus."

"But that don't tell me anything!" cried Primrose. "That's one of your puzzles, Jack. I don't know a bit better than I did before. *He's* in my Roman history."

"When you are ignorant on any point," replied Jack, sitting bold upright in the carriage, "there are but two things to be done; find out at once, or wait and see."

Primrose laughed, and gave him as severe a pinch on the back of his hand as could be inflicted, Jack said, by a soft-shelled crab! And then, not being disposed to wait, she set herself to work upon the other thing to be done; thinking away as hard as she could; and presently cried out—

"O I know! it's old Scipio at the greenhouse! I never heard his whole name before."

"Didn't you!" said Jack; "well, don't tell anybody, Prim,—it's a profound secret."

And now the horses went swiftly round the turn towards Hicory Corner, and the little village itself appeared, all gleaming in the afternoon light; and before Prim had done musing over Jack's strange injunction, she found herself standing at the door of the little greenhouse.

But what a change had come over it! No leafy shade inside, no sprinkling of gay flowers; the shelves were empty, and piles of deserted flower pots stood wherever they could find a place. Prim began to think that the gardener must have moved away, as well as his flowers; but when she had pounded the door two or three times with her little hand, a door at the further end opened, and old Scipio came limping along to let her in.

"O Mr Scipio!" said Primrose, (for she didn't dare use that mysterious name even to himself,) "are your flowers all dead?"

"No, little lady," the old man answered with his gentle smile, "dey's only set out,—transplanted like, as we'll be when we gets to heaven, into de sunshine. Dey's in de garden."

"Why, have you got a garden too?" said Primrose,—"may I go and see it?"

"See anything old Scip's got—little white blossom!" said the old gardener; and Prim followed him eagerly through the empty greenhouse to the further door. But there she stopped in wonder and admiration.

"Well, I thought *we* had a good many flowers," she said, looking out upon the little wilderness of blue and yellow and purple and red, that lay spread at her feet. "Mr Scipio, it's splendid!"

"Little lady like de garden?" said the old man; "see de flowers better if she come out."

Prim needed no second invitation, and in a minute more was pacing up and down the walks with her hands behind her, almost holding her breath sometimes as she caught that of the flowers. There were so many, and they were in such fine condition, and so well arranged, and they were so utterly bewildering in their glory and fragrance. Prim was not the first admiring visiter they had had by very many; and other people had come to buy as well as to admire; but not one of them all had given the old gardener half the satisfaction that it did to watch the "little white blossom" in her silent rapture.

"She one of de Lord's lilies, sure," the old man muttered to himself. "Pray de Lord He cut down all de thorns around her."

"I say, sir," quoth Jack, who thought he had been unnoticed quite long enough, "I want one of your very sweetest geraniums; I don't care what the price is."

"One of de sweetest, hey?" the old man queried.

"Yes," said Jack,— "sweet as a girl's temper that can't be soured."

"For de little blossom there?" inquired Scipio.

"No, not for her; it's for another one. I just brought Prim along to see how *her* temper would stand it. I don't mean to get her anything."

"Ah," said the old man, shaking his head, "temptation come all too easy, sir; I wouldn't hurry him. De good Lord—*He* never tempt to evil; 'pears like we'd better not too. Yes, you help de blossom keep white. You get your geranium, and I'll give de little lady such a bunch of flowers dat she have no chance to long for nothing."

Jack was not ready with an answer to this; so, though

privately furious that the interests of science should be thus disregarded and set aside, he went silently about the garden after old Scipio and Prim—the child being in a transport of delight, and the old man watching her tenderly, and gathering his flowers all the while ; and thus by the time Prim had thoroughly explored every walk and bed there was ready for her such a bouquet as she had never seen.

But Jack was not destined to satisfaction in any way. It was not the time of year to transplant large geraniums, the gardener said. There were little ones, almost like mere cuttings, but with good roots ; and there were cuttings—which would Jack have ?

Jack would not have either. His idea was to take home a magnificent, tall geranium, full of leaves, and bright with flowers ; but although such were there in plenty, old Scipio assured him that to take them up now, at this season, even if it did not kill the plant, would destroy its beauty for a long time. So the end of the matter was this : Jack drove home in an extremely gloomy state of mind, and Primrose was quite too absorbed in her flowers to notice him. But the worst was to come ; for when Lily found that this great expedition, begun and carried out with such mysterious importance, had yielded nothing but a bunch of flowers for Prim, she laughed at Jack to her heart's content. It was vexatious every way. The two girls left at home had had a splendid time, bringing home plants for themselves ; Prim had her great bunch of flowers ; only Jack had nothing to shew, and there was no temper much tried but his. Altogether, the explorations of science for that day had quite failed ; and Jack had the pleasure (often enjoyed by mischief-makers) of perceiving how much easier it is to do than to undo, to wound than to heal.

Meantime, Primrose was following up science in another way. There was a brisk shower during the night, and when Prim went to her garden next morning, it seemed to her as if the whole little bed had turned into earthworms. Some were meandering across the wet ground, some were just finding their way out, and some were just finding their way in ; it was a "period of earthworms." Prim stood for a minute in silent disgust, and then ran away into the house, and upstairs to Mrs May's dressing-room, twisting her shoulders and knitting her brows with every symptom of discomfort.

"Mamma," she said, "they're all over my garden !"

"What, the flowers ?" inquired her mother. "No wonder, after the rain last night ; it must have made them perfectly happy."

"No, mamma, the earthworms."

"Doubtless they are happy too !" said her mother laughing. "Prim, did you forget to look at the flowers ?"

"Mamma, I couldn't *think* of anything but the earthworms ! What are they doing in my garden ?" said Primrose.

"Enjoying themselves, I have no doubt,—besides helping the robins to find a breakfast."

"I hope the robins are very hungry this morning," said Primrose, who was in an extremely bloodthirsty mood.

"That is one of the uses of earthworms," said Mrs May. "They give many a meal to birds, and chickens, and fishes, and toads."

"But I don't like toads much better !" said Primrose. "I wish there needn't be ugly things for ugly things to eat."

"Come down to the garden, and let us study these ugly things a little," said her mother. "They are very curious." And somewhat unwillingly, holding fast her mother's hand, Primrose went.

The earthworms were in full possession.

"Look," said Mrs May ; "watch and see how curious they are. No eyes, no feet, no hands ; and yet how much they do. This one is just going down into the earth, and you see he stretches out his head and uses it like an awl, boring his way. If you were to run your finger into that soft mould, the finger would be soiled and muddy ; but the earthworm is covered from head to foot with a sort of slime, so that not the least particle of soil can stick to him. He comes out as clean and bright as he went in ; as if he had just made his toilet under ground. Then here is another hurrying across the bed at a great rate, by means of his rings and bristles. His long body is made up of elastic rings set close together. See how they draw up and stretch out as he moves ; and on the under side of these rings there are bundles of minute bristle-like things, which help him to glide over the ground so swiftly. His mouth has two lips--the upper one projecting far over the under."

"Does he eat my flowers with his two lips ?" asked Primrose.

"Not often : sometimes he draws down a little seedling into his hole ; or perhaps a blade of grass or leaf of clover. Look, here is one now, half drawn in and devoured ; but the worm lives most of all upon earth. He has no eyes, indeed, (that we know,) but plenty of nerves, and a very delicate sense of touch. See how quick he darts back into his hole if I strike the earth near him."

"Well, where have they been all summer ?" said Primrose. "I never saw so many before."

"It has been dry weather, and then the worms always go deep down into the earth, where it is moist and cool. So they do in winter, to get beyond the line of frozen ground."

"I was so glad of the rain," said Prim ; "and now I'm willing it should be all dry again, to make the worms go down, down—right through to the other side of the world." With which somewhat vengeful desire Prim turned away, and went back to breakfast.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"AH, it is well to have breakfast early this morning," said Mr May as he came in ; "for there is a great deal of business on hand."

"More than usual?" asked his wife.

"Why, yes—more than usual, in so far as it is *unusual* business. I have to hold a court of justice to-day."

"*You*, papa?" said Jack.

"Papa, what is a court of justice?" said Primrose.

"A court at which offenders are tried for their offences."

"But we don't have any offenders here, in the country," said Lily.

"Don't we?" said her father smiling. "Then perhaps I may be obliged to hold a Court of Inquiry first, to find out (since there are no offenders) who committed the offence."

"Papa, please tell us what the offence was," said Clover.

"Because you *look* as if it was something about us."

"It is not a guilty conscience that makes you such a good guesser," said Mr May laughing ; "I am sure of that, Clover. Well, I will state the case. A complaint has been filed in my study by Roger, the head gardener."

"Oh!" cried all the children. "What could Roger say about us?"

"Very mean of him to say anything," added Lily.

"My dear," said her father, "before you apply any such

name to people's words, be sure you know what they were, and why they were said."

"What were they, papa?" said Clover. "Won't you please tell us?"

"I told Roger," said Mr May, "that the walks about the house were not kept in such order as pleased me. And Roger replied that such order was not possible now-a-days; for that when he had carefully gone over the walks with rake and roller, in ten minutes from that time weeds would be flung on one place, and stones on another, and tools scattered in another, by some party or parties unknown." There was a dead silence.

"Papa," Clover began timidly, "I think Roger was not *quite* right in his statement—at least, so far as I know anything about it. I did drop one of my tools—my trowel—as I was coming in; and I didn't know it till I got to the tool-house. And then it was so late, that mamma bade me leave the trowel where it was till morning. She said the dew wouldn't hurt it much for once."

"Acquitted, honourably and undoubtedly," said Mr May, with a smile.

"Papa, I did lay three or four little stones on the walk," said Prim; "but I laid them close up by the grass, and they didn't make the walk look bad at all."

"Ah, this sentence will have to be 'Guilty, but recommended to mercy,' said Mr May, shaking his head. "In consideration of the youth and ignorance, and previous good character of the prisoner."

"Well, I think Roger makes a great fuss," said Lily. "Of *course* I threw my weeds on the walks,—where should I put them?"

"There spoke Lily!" said her father laughing. "Where

should you put them?—anywhere but on the walk, my dear.”

“Well, Sam said if I left ’em in heaps on the grass it would kill that,” said Lily.

“Don’t leave them anywhere,” said her father. “Don’t lose sight of them till they are safe out on Roger’s weed-heap, for him to burn up.”

“Yes, papa, that sounds easy,” said Lily; “but I have *loads* of weeds.”

“Too many to be carried away?”

“I guess you’d think so, papa, if you tried to carry them in your arms all the way to Roger’s heap. And they’ve pulled the handle out of my basket already.”

“There!” said Mr May, “I felt sure I should have to pay the costs of this suit! These children must have a wheelbarrow.”

The court was thereupon dissolved by acclamation; with such a clapping of hands, that nobody remembered to ask about Lily’s sentence, nor whether indeed she was to have any. All thoughts were wrapped up in the wheelbarrow. And certainly that wheelbarrow proved a wonderful success. Not a great heavy concern, like Roger’s, but small and light, so that even Prim could manage it easily; just large enough to hold a good little armful of weeds, and to carry off a handful of stones and rubbish without spilling a bit by the way. No more musing on the walks now, for Roger to complain of and clear away; no more dropped tools—the little barrow carried them safely back to the tool-house without losing one. But as the days went by, Mrs May thought she perceived some other things that were worse than the weeds. Sitting there at her window, where she could see all the three children at work,

she presently began to notice that the little barrow was oftenest down by Lily's garden. Clover and Prim seemed to be piling stones and weeds into their little baskets again. And once when Prim had filled her basket, she lugged it all the way down the hill to where Lily was at work; but to Mrs May's astonishment, instead of coming back empty handed, Prim toiled up the hill again with her basket as full as ever. Poor Prim! she looked very tired and hot and desponding; and setting her basket down on the walk, she sat her herself down beside it, and called Clover.

"Clover! are you *very* busy?"

"Very!" said Clover's cheerful voice; "what do you want, Prim?"

"Just you," said Prim, wearily; "but never mind—if you're so *very* busy."

Nobody would have guessed that Clover was busy at all, for she came at once.

"Why, you poor little Prim, how tired you are!"

"Yes, it's these weeds," said Primrose.

"Now, just let me weed your garden for once," said Clover
"It's too hard work for you."

"Oh no, it's not that!" said Primrose; "but what shall I do with 'em. Here they all are, and I've nothing to put 'em in. Lily wouldn't let me have the barrow to carry 'em off, because she says she likes to have it stand by her, so that she can throw the weeds right in; and when I went way down with my basket to empty it, she said my weeds would make it too heavy—she'd enough of her own. And so she has, I'm sure—plenty! But what shall I do with mine?"—and Prim pointed to a great heap ready for transportation.



"Prim toiled up the hill again with her basket as full as ever."—P. 224.



"How long does she want it?" said Clover, glancing down at Lily, who was taking the world very easy that morning.

"Oh, I don't know," said Primrose, "all day, I guess. I think I'll go and tell mamma that Lily has let the wheelbarrow run right over her hedge."

"No, that wouldn't do," said Clover; "that would be to let it run over ours too. I'll carry off the weeds, Prim. I'm strong; it won't take me but a few minutes."

"But you were so busy," said Prim.

"Never mind, I'll be busy here for a while."

And Clover fell to work, carrying off Prim's basket all the way to Roger's refuse heap, and then coming back brisk and gay to fill it again, until there was not a weed left in all Prim's little garden. But it was too late to touch her own again, for that morning.

"I saw such a strange thing to-day," said Mrs. May at dinner.

"Ah?" said Mr May, "what was that?"

"I was looking out at our three gardens," she answered, "and as I looked, I saw Clover's hedge spring up, and grow, and bear fruit; and the fruit was wonderfully pleasant to the eyes."

"Good growing weather," said Mr May, with a smiling glance at his eldest daughter; "though I did not know that even in Clover's garden things made *quite* such rapid progress. I'm very sure they don't in mine. Mamma must have been taking a nap at the window, I fancy."

"I might have thought it was the weather too," said Mrs May; "but when I turned to Lily's garden, behold her hedge was quite wilted down and trodden under foot."

Mr May raised his eyebrows significantly.

"*I am out of my depth,*" he said; "*but I suppose you all know where you are. How is it, Lily?*"

But Lily gave him no answer.

"Mamma," said Primrose, "Clover's hedge grows in *all* weathers!" And it would have been hard to tell which was the deepest, Clover's blush of confusion or Lily's blush of shame.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ONE bright summer morning Mrs May came into the breakfast room with a little note in her hand. She looked grave, the children thought, yet her first words did not sound so.

"Which of you has any white flowers?" she said, stooping to kiss the young faces in turn.

"I've got white petunias," said Lily.

"Some of my pinks are *quite* white, mamma," said Clover. "And I've plenty of sweet alyssum and candytuft; and there's one white gilliflower, and some white phlox."

"And there's my white minor convolvulus," said Lily. "My white asters aren't out yet."

"And my beautiful white everlasting," said Clover.

"Mamma," said Primrose, who had been silently pondering the question, "there must be a white rosebud just beginning to open, because it was *almost* ready last night. And a white pansy, and two white sweet peas."

"Can you spare them, love?" said her mother.

"Why, it isn't *sparing*, to give 'em to you, mamma!" said Prim. "Do you want 'em this morning? because to-night there'll be white primroses, you know, too."

"I want them this morning," said her mother with a sigh; "and the sweet alyssum and candytuft, and the white eternal flower, and the phlox. And some of your white convolvulus flowers, Lily. Not the petunias, dear, they are not delicate enough."

"Shall we get them right away, mamma?" said Clover.

"Yes, pick them now, while the dew is on them, and they will keep fresh the longer. Not the full-blown ones, but those which are just opening; and when you come back I will tell you what they are for."

The children took their small baskets and ran down to the gardens—a little bit wondering and sober, they knew not why, and yet catching the sunbeams like any real flowers of the garden.

"I wish I had more to get!" said Lily. "Just one flower! I wonder why mamma didn't want my petunias?"

"I'll give you some of my mignonette to put with it," said Clover. "And then there are your beautiful rose geranium leaves, Lily; and you can have my white stock. Your basket will look lovely."

Lily thought Clover did just then.

"It wouldn't have looked pretty a bit, only for Clover, mamma," she said afterwards. "She has such a nice way of thinking of things." And the three baskets did indeed "look lovely."

"Set them in the other room, where it is cool and dark," said Mrs May, "and then we will take them with us just as they are. We are going to see Mrs De Peyster this morning."

"Mamma! Does *she* want the white flowers?" said Clover.

Mrs May's lips trembled, and she wrapped her arms round the children, stooping down by them as she answered—

"Her dear little baby has gone home to Jesus—away from its earthly home. And there's only the little white form that the baby used to wear left here now; and we want the white flowers to lay round it. Mrs De Peyster sent to ask me for some of *your* flowers."

Clover covered her face with her hands, weeping silently, and Prim hid her face in her mother's neck, and Lily broke into sobs and lamentations.

"Mamma! mamma! The poor little baby!"

"Nay, rather say, the rich little baby!" said Mrs May, though her own tears were dropping fast,—“Gone to receive a crown of life which shall never fade away. It is the poor mother.” And Mrs May laid her head down upon Prim's, and sobbed for a minute as if she had been one of the children. Then she rose up, and said they must get ready at once to go and take the flowers.

And soon, in the morning light, which was yet fresh and cool, they were all driving along the pretty wood road towards Mrs De Peyster's little cottage. The early sunbeams gilded everything, the birds sang, the little brook leaped and rejoiced on its way; but the children sat and looked at their baskets of white flowers, and didn't talk a bit. Sam was driving, and Prim sat perched up on the front seat of the little carriage, at his side. In her basket lay the white rosebud, above all the other flowers, gently and softly loosening its pure leaves in the morning light; but the sunbeams didn't make Prim's face unbend. She sat looking at the rosebud, her little face knit into a perfect brown study.

"What is Prim thinking of?" said her brother at last; "Not sorry to part with your rosebud, pet?"

"Oh no," said Prim with a long sigh. "Sam," she whispered, drawing close up to her brother, "aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid!—of what?" said Sam, with a glance at the little earnest face that was nestling against him.

"Afraid to go there—to Mrs De Peyster's," said Prim.

"No," said Sam, "I'm not afraid of the little baby, Prim."

"But the baby isn't there!" said Prim, "and I don't know what is there, Sam, and I'm afraid."

"I can tell you what is there," said Sam, drawing his arm round his little sister, "the little white dress that the baby used to wear. She does not want it now, and it must be laid away for a while; and then the Lord will make it over new, and it shall be all beautiful and glorious, and the baby shall wear it again."

"You mean that—what used to be the baby?" said Prim.

"It used to be part of the baby," said Sam; "the little body in which the baby's spirit dwelt. But *that* is safe with Jesus now, Prim, and God will keep the little body which we lay away in the ground, and will bring it forth again."

"But, Sam," said little Prim, "why don't the baby's mother keep it herself? What does she have it put in the ground for?"

"You fold up your white frock when the winter comes, Prim; and you lay it away out of sight until summer time. And you put your little seeds in the ground and cover them up, waiting till God shall bring forth the perfect flowers. It is just so with this; and the little body that we lay away in weakness and death, shall be raised in glory and power, no more to die."

"And then the real baby in heaven shall have it again?" said Prim.

"Surely," Sam answered, as they drove out into the little clearing that surrounded the lake. How fair it looked!—the soft hush of the summer morning upon everything; and not a strange sight or sound, except two or three country wagons standing here and there among the trees, and a low hum of voices from the open house door. Sam tied his

horse in the shade of a great maple near the house, and then they all went in.

The children laid their sweet white flowers round the little blossom that had been plucked so suddenly ; but "the Good Husbandman may pluck his roses and gather in his lilies at any time"—ay, "even in the first summer month," if it pleases Him ; for He knows best. Yet the children wept.

Then all that was left on earth of the baby was borne away a little distance into the woodland, and buried there, where already there were two other little graves. And the people that stood round took one last look at the little white face, and the tiny hand that held the rosebud, and then chanted softly these words—

The baby is asleep
On Jesus breast ;
His arms of love enfold her,
His hands of power hold her
In perfect rest.

No sharp distress or pain
Can vex her there,—
No tears for the day's sorrow,
No fear for the to-morrow,
No want, no care.

Thy little ransomed one
Is safe on high,
And the dear form before thee
The Lord shall raise in glory,
Now lay it by.

"It'll be a sort o' comfort to me to think—when I can think of anything," said poor Mrs De Peyster, as Mrs May took leave of her, "to think how those children just wrapped her up in their white flowers !"

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHILDREN, it will never do to tell all the work that was done that summer by our three little spades ; and this must be my last chapter. Many other things that I might say about weeds, and seeds, and earthworms, and caterpillars, must be kept for another time. And so as I cannot go through the summer with you just now, the best thing I can do is to jump at once to the end of the summer, and finish with that.

Summer was passing softly away, like a sweet dream,—vanishing silently out of sight, hiding herself before the frost should come. There had been no frost yet, and the three gardens were in full bloom ; asters, and zinnias, and heart's-ease, and amaranthus—there was a splendid show. The children thought they were as happy as they could possibly be, when suddenly an event took place which proved that when people are gardeners there is no end to their happiness ; or rather, that it stretches on in such a long perspective that it is quite impossible to guess where the end is.

The event was this : Mr Vick sent the children his catalogue of hardy bulbs for fall planting and spring blooming—absolutely sent it to *them*, for themselves,—a new, fresh catalogue, with a pink cover, and with such flower-pictures inside that Lily nearly screamed with delight at the sight of them. Sam had brought it from the post-office after tea, and now in the lamp light the three young heads clustered

together above its pages. "A double hyacinth!" "A parrot tulip!" "Crocuses!" You could hear such exclamations every few minutes, but smothered and spoken softly, so as to disturb no one else. The children talked hardly above their breath, even in their wonder and admiration.

"But, oh dear! what's the use after all?" said Lily at last. "We haven't got any money! I guess Mr Vick didn't know that."

"I'm very glad he sent it, though," said Clover; "I like to know about things. I think it was so kind of him, Lily. But what are 'hardy bulbs' I wonder? That's on the cover."

"Hardy bulbs," said Mr May, looking up from his paper with a quizzical face, "mean, in this case, only tulips, hyacinths, crocuses, snow-drops, and such trifles."

Such trifles! Clover and Lily looked at each other, and Primrose heaved a sigh that came from the very lowest corner of her heart.

"They're to be planted right off," put in Jack, peering over at the catalogue; "and then they stick up their heads through the first snow, and are covered with flowers immediately. That's being hardy bulbs."

"Jack, Jack!" remonstrated his mother. "You are certainly a hardy boy."

"They're so ungrateful and grasping, these girls, mamma," said Jack. "Here they've had flowers upon flowers all summer, and now they're crying for hardy bulbs!"

"We're *not* crying for hardy bulbs!" said Lily indignantly.

"Come here, Prim," said Mr May, throwing down his paper; "let me see your eyes."

Now Prim's eyes were certainly not tearful, as she raised

them for her father's inspection, but wistful they as certainly were. Jack had some reason for declaring that they were full of crocuses and snow-drops.

"I don't see the drops, of any sort," said Mr May, smiling. "Prim, would a dollar's worth of hardy bulbs make you quite happy?"

Prim laughed—there was no need to say a word more.

"Here it is, then—or rather, here they are," said her father, as he once more took three dollar bills from his pocket-book and laid one before each of the children. "Now if Mr Vick happens to have an endless variety of catalogues, what will become of my purse?"

"Papa—don't!" said Clover; "I did not mean to ask for a thing more, indeed, papa! Please take these back."

"On the contrary, I please to leave them there," said Mr May, with a laugh. "My dear, you did not ask, it's my own pleasure. I want to see what new wonders will bloom out in those fairy-land gardens."

"Well, I didn't mean to ask, either," said Lily, "but I wanted it dreadfully."

"Mamma, what are bulbs?" said little Primrose.

"A bulb is a kind of thick, fleshy root, shaped like an onion."

"And if they're planted in the fall what do they do all winter?" pursued Primrose.

"They lie in the earth and wait, Prim," said her mother, pushing back the soft locks of hair from the child's forehead. "Wait till the winter is over and gone, and then with the first soft airs of spring they begin to appear; shooting up their fresh green leaves first, and after that the glory of their blossoms."

"Oh, here are *such* hyacinths!" said Lily, from the catalogue. "'Deep blue, and tall;' and 'white, and low;' and red, and everything. And tulips—'gold striped tulips.' It's enough to make one crazy! Papa, there's nothing like you in all the world!"

"Not even a gold striped tulip?" said her father, laughing. "I'm afraid a dollar won't go far among such wonders, Lily."

And in truth it was harder work to make out these lists than those seed-lists of long ago; for many of the bulbs, as Lily said, considered themselves worth a good deal. To be sure, a dozen snow-drops might be had for twenty-five cents, and some of the tulips were but ten cents apiece; but then it was as hard for the children as for some older people quite to withstand the fascination of a higher price; and there was an irresistible attraction toward those dignified bulbs of which only two or three could be bought for a dollar.

"I daresay they think themselves cheap at that," said Lily; "but I don't. Now see—if I get a tall, blue Prince Frederick hyacinth for forty cents, and a low, red Princess Royal"—

"A low Princess Royal!" quoth Jack.

"Be quiet!" said Lily, "a low red Princess Royal for seventy cents—no, that won't do at all."

"I shall begin with the little things first," said Primrose. "I want some snow-drops."

"Oh, well, you can have 'em," said Lily; "but if you begin with the little things, you'll have no money left for the big ones. I can tell you that."

"How would it do to get one dear thing first," said Clover,—"one of the very expensive ones, you know, just to see

what it's like; and then spend the rest of the dollar in others?"

"That's a beautiful plan," said Lily. "You begin, Clover."

"I think I must have one hyacinth, and one tulip," said Clover, pressing her hands on her flushed cheeks. "I'll take this yellow hyacinth—*La Pluie d'Or*—the rain of gold, you know; that must be splendid."

"Oh, magnificent!" said Lily. "But that's only thirty cents—not *very* expensive."

"But my tulip is," said Clover—"Dorothea Blanche—very beautiful new white.' It's forty five cents."

"That makes seventy five cents," said Lily, quite lost for the moment in Clover's arrangements. "Dear me, how much you'll have!"

"Then with them," said Clover, in the same absorbed way, "this Milton—'rosy purple.' That goes well with my yellow hyacinth."

"Ten cents more," said Lily—"eighty five."

"And then, one Persian iris—fifteen cents. That's it exactly. You see the iris is 'a magnificent border plant.'"

"There's no picture of it, is there?" said Lily. "Dear me, I wish I could make out as good a list. But here's one tulip at any rate—white, striped with rose—*Marriage de ma Fille*. I wonder if that's pretty?"

"Extremely—sometimes," said Mr May, with a mocking tone. But Lily was deep in her catalogue, and scarcely heard him.

"I guess I won't take that, after all," she said. "I'll have the Grand Duke of Russia, all red and yellow; then, *he* must have the Crown Imperial, that's red striped, and fifteen cents—that's thirty five; and my blue hyacinth is thirty five more."

"Which blue hyacinth?" said Prim.

"This one—A la Mode. I guess *that* must have grown at Grundy Castle."

"Well, that's only seventy cents," said Clover; "and you haven't taken any *very* expensive ones after all."

"No, let me see," said Lily, studying the catalogue. "I guess I'll have to leave them to you and Prim—I want so many things. What shall I do with my thirty cents?—get one more hyacinth—or three tulips? Here are some little ones, the earliest of all, but they've got no names. I'll tell you—I'll have a *Narcissus*!"

"Oh, get this one—the Hoop Petticoat," said Prim-rose.

"Can't," said Lily; "it costs fifty cents. I'll get Butter and Eggs—that will do just as well, and be nice when spring comes. Eighty cents; and then one of these blue grape hyacinths over here—ninety cents."

"Those blue grape hyacinths are the Blue Bells of Scotland," said Sam.

"Are they?" said Lily. "Now, ten cents more. I think I'll have a white tulip, too, among all these blue and yellow things. Here's a good one—La Reine; rosy white, and just ten cents."

"Now, Prim," said her father, who had been listening with great interest to the two first lists, "come here and sit on my knee, and let us see what sort of a choice you will make. You can write, and I will look over your shoulder. What comes first?"

"A white lily, papa," said Prim, writing it down. "And a brown parrot tulip; and a Blue Flag—fifty three cents, that makes. And I must have one hyacinth, you know," said

Primrose, turning back to that part of the catalogue. "This one, papa—Rose Mignonne. And then six crocuses."

"Named or unnamed? The named cost twice as much as the others."

"But I like 'em so much better!" said Primrose. "I want the Cloth of Gold, and the Cloth of Silver, and the dark blue King William, and the striped Captain Cook, and the light blue Passetout, and the white Pigeon."

"How much does that come to?" said her father, smiling.

"Let me see, papa. I said fifty three cents, and Rose Mignonne is thirty, that's eighty three cents; and six crocuses are twenty cents more. O papa! that's three cents too much!"

"I'll stand the three cents," said Mr May, looking with much loving amusement at the intent, earnest little face.

"But that wouldn't be fair, papa."

"Then you shall give me some of the crocus flowers when they come out. I bespeak a dark King William and a striped Captain Cook."

Primrose laughed and looked very happy, and the three lists were at once enclosed in an envelope, ready for the next day's mail.

"I suppose," said Mr May, standing on the rug and looking at his wife, after the young ones had gone to bed, "that you would as lieve have *our* hardy bulbs display their colours in the children's gardens as anywhere?"

"Could not be a better place," she answered, smiling.

Whereupon Mr May sat down and wrote another order, and put it in the same envelope; and the children in their little beds never even dreamed what he had done.

In due time the bulbs arrived, beautifully packed in a little

box, and at first the children did not notice how much too large the box was for *their* small lists. But when they began to pull out the little packages from the loose seeds in which they were stowed, and to read new names on this one and that one, they were almost beside themselves. Each bulb was separately wrapped in soft paper, with a nice printed label; and when they had said a few times, "That's yours, Clover," or "That's Prim's," then the word was, "Whose is this? and this?" And their father, standing by and laughing at them, said, "You will have to divide." Then they knew all. But even Mr May was surprised, after that, by a whole package of snow-drops, for which nobody had sent, but which Mr Vick had put in "just to please himself," Lily declared.

"Papa, what *could* make him do it?" said Primrose. "Did you tell him I wanted 'em, and hadn't any more money?"

"No, I did not tell him that," said her father, laughing. "But some people, you know, do more, and some less, than they are asked. Now Mr Vick likes to do more."

"Well, I wish everybody did," said Primrose; "it makes people so happy!"

"But oh, papa!" said Lily, "just listen to the colours of our tulips! Clover's been making a list of them. Listen, mamma. Now, Clover, read."

And Clover read:

"Gold striped; purple; gold lac (whatever that is!); white; red, with a yellow edge; rosy white; white and red; blue; orange striped; golden yellow, striped with bronze; red striped; puce and white (what's puce, I wonder!); white, striped with rose; and copper, striped with violet."

"And then we've got red and blue and yellow hyacinths,

and snow-drops, and six crocuses, and a Narcissus, and a white lily, and a Persian iris. It's just like the Arabian Nights!" cried Lily; "and we shall be as happy as the day is long!"

"Or as the spring is," said her mother, with smiling eyes, that were yet for a minute as wistful as Prim's own.

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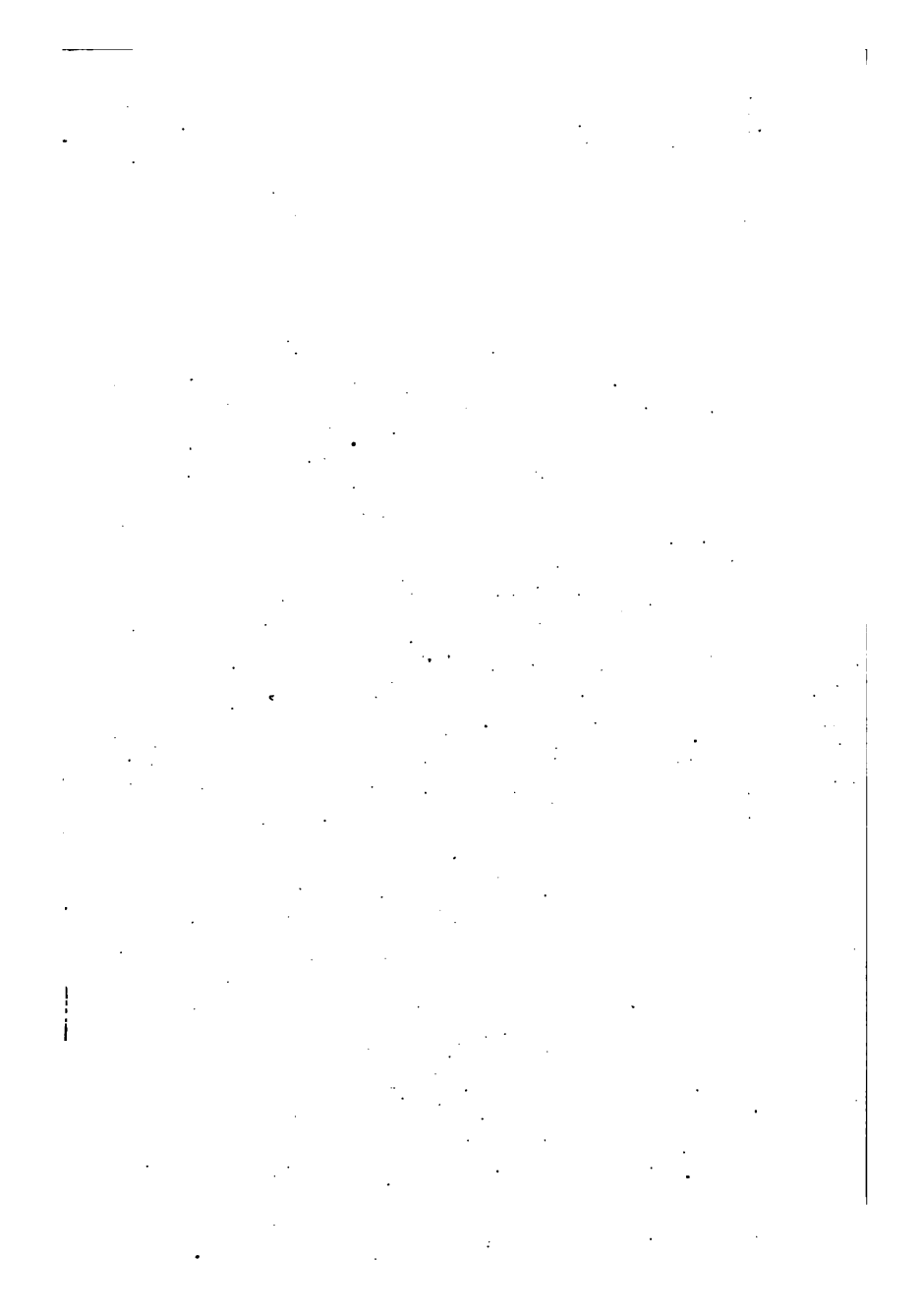
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